DAVE DARRIN'S SOUTH AMERICAN CRUISE

H·IRVING·HANCOCK

THE ·DAVE· DARRIN SERIES

"I Tender Herewith My Sword."

Frontispiece.

Dave Darrin's South American Cruise

OR

Two Innocent Young Naval Tools of an Infamous Conspiracy

By

H. IRVING HANCOCK

Author of "Dave Darrin at Vera Cruz," "Dave Darrin on Mediterranean Service," "Dave Darrin on the Asiatic Station," "Dave Darrin and the German Submarines," "Dave Darrin After the Mine Layers," etc., etc.

Illustrated

PHILADELPHIA
HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1919, BY
HOWARD E. ALTEMUS

PRINTED IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I — ASHORE AT COLON 11
Dan gets a mauling. "The señor is a brick." Dave Darrin's close call. A friend in need. The mysterious package. A dazzling find. Dave and Dan are disturbed. A sign of trouble.

CHAPTER II — THE JEWELED CROSS 29
A puzzle and a hoodoo. On an elusive trail. The señor disappears. The sudden summons to rejoin ship. Their request refused. Orders must be obeyed. "Report to the bridge, sir." Fated to keep a princely gift.

CHAPTER III — ON AN IMPORTANT MISSION 39
A revolution in the making. "On to Corima!" Ashore and awaiting orders. In tropical darkness. "War in Vengara is murder!" Mischief is brewing at La Choya. The face in the bush.

CHAPTER IV — SETTING A TRAP FOR A DICTATOR ... 51
The landing party reaches shore. What lies beyond? A gift by mistake. Señor Gorgo is inquisitive. Strict orders to the young ensigns. "Hark! What is that?" For the honor of the service. Trouble is within hearing.

CHAPTER V — THE MAN WHO PASSED THE GUARD. 61
A sudden alarm. "Officer of the Guard! Post number eleven!" The sentry makes a capture. Ensign Darrin gets a shock. Dave and Dan meet a friend. The bluff that worked. A sad blunder. Ensign Dave goes suddenly pale.

CHAPTER VI — DARRIN FEELS THE STING OF DISGRACE 70
A shot in the night. Signals from the battleship. "Who let the man through?" Vengaran officers in a rage. The photograph that solved a mystery. Ensign Darrin surrenders his sword.

CHAPTER VII — WHEN THE ENEMY WON 81
Vengarans make dire threats. "I'd have him shot!" Danny Grin is ready to quit. A brother officer seeks to shoulder the blame. In the hands of the Admiral. The jeweled cross bobs up again. Dave Darrin in distress.

CHAPTER VIII — DARK DEEDS ARE REPORTED 89
"The reign of blood has set in." A mistake that involves millions. Ensigns reported to the Navy Department. Dave Darrin proposes a desperate plan. "Worse than madness." The captain not convinced.

CHAPTER IX — OFF TO CAPTURE A PRESIDENT 99
The Admiral gives his consent. Slight hope for the young ensigns. "Good luck and Godspeed." Gridley Boys go over the side. Escorted by Vengaran cavalry. A challenge in the virgin forest. Good bye to the friendly coast.

CHAPTER X — ON THE FIRING LINE 107
Sought out by prowlers' bullets. The pass that may prove a death warrant. Peril lurks on all sides. In the camp of the loyalists. A real soldier. Awakened by the call to battle.

CHAPTER XI — THE TRAIL TO THE REBEL LINES ... 116
The battle grows fast and furious. Too brave to seek cover. Dave and Danny cool in the face of fire. The General's trap. Hand to hand. The death of a leader. In the hands of the enemy. Served well by defeat. "Your business, or I will have you shot!"

CHAPTER XII — THE MAGIC OF THE JEWELED CROSS. 124
Dave Darrin uses his fists. A rebel rifle at his breast. Saved by the Cross. Dave makes a vigorous protest. Not war, but murder. Prisoners meet their fate. "Another volley," said Dan, his lips twitching.

CHAPTER XIII — SUCCESS BELONGS TO THE BOLD.... 139
Dave silences himself in time. The long, weary march. What the peon gets. Grave doubts assail them. Cheering news at last. Benedito's camp is less than a mile away. Then —.

CHAPTER XIV — THE GOAL IS AT HAND 146
Received by the rebel chieftain. A welcome with a string to it. The jeweled cross changes hands. "Death for a mistake." Benedito boasts. Dave and Dan have grave forebodings.

CHAPTER XV — IN THE LAIR OF THE TIGER..... 156
Ensign Darrin speaks out in meeting. The young officers explain their mission. A generous host. Will have their chance. "That is an infamous lie!" The voice in the jungle. The ex-Dictator shows his hand.

CHAPTER XVI — THE PLOTTERS ARE OVERHEARD.... 167
"Few are so brave they can withstand torture." The Gridley spirit. The net tightens. "That scoundrel must go with us." Honored guests held up. Dave and Dan in great peril.

CHAPTER XVII — IN THE SERVICE OF THE ENEMY.. 176
Darrin drills the rebels. A pleasant stroll with Don José. "Would make traitors of us." High honors within their reach. Outside the enemy's lines. "General, you are indiscreet." Benedito sees a great light

CHAPTER XVIII — IN BAD COMPANY..... 183
"You are our prisoner!" The long trail to the coast. Beset by many perils. "I shall kill you without warning." Danny has a pleasant task. A painless death promised them. Confronted by rebel soldiers.

CHAPTER XIX — OUT OF THE FRYING PAN..... 195
How Dave's bluff worked. "Be ready to shoot in a fifth of a second." Darrin discusses education. With an ear to the ground. It happened in a flash.

CHAPTER XX — ON A THRILLING FLIGHT..... 204
A revolver's muzzle between his teeth. "Cavalry are coming this way." Scouts pick up Darrin's trail. Tricking a trooper. Regular horse marines. In a kettle of fish. On the battle line again.

CHAPTER XXI — CLEAR AT LAST. BUT — 215
"Hoofs and wheels." Don José in a lowly place. Dave draws his own blood. Safe on the coast. At sea in a sloop. Darrin is too kind. "Sail ho!" A shot across their bows.

CHAPTER XXII — OFFERS THE GRIM CHOICE..... 230
Dave and Dan are tricked. The sloop boarded. On the enemy's cruiser. "You are prisoners!" Their first surrender. All hope seems gone. Plenty of fight left in them still.

CHAPTER XXIII — IN THE HOUR OF NEED..... 238
"A pair of goats." Death to be their fate. The battle on the cruiser's bridge. Signal rockets over the sea. Prisoners in the brig. The "Panama" to the rescue. Will they be in time?

CHAPTER XXIV — THE SEARCH OF THE ENEMY'S SHIP..... 249
With rifles at ready. Dave and Dan in dire peril. "Kill if you dare!" Yankee might finds a way. The triumph of Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell.

DAVE DARRIN'S SOUTH AMERICAN CRUISE

CHAPTER I

THE KIND STRANGER OF COLON

"DANNY Grin, you're a sight!"

"Well, what if I am? It doesn't really matter," replied Ensign Daniel Dalzell calmly.

"But look at your uniform!" protested Ensign Dave Darrin, United States Navy.

"A bit soiled, isn't it?" inquired Darrin's young brother officer.

"Soiled?" echoed Dave. "Why, it's —"

"Never mind," advised Dan. "I came honestly by the mussing."

"What happened to you?"

"Oh, I just got into a little mix-up," explained Danny. "And — there he is! Come on! I'd like you to meet him."

"Who is he? The fellow who put your uniform in this condition?" asked Dave, as he followed, at leisurely pace, the rapid strides of his chum, who hurried out of the spa on Ancon Street, Colon, Isthmus of Panama.

"No," Dan explained, over his shoulder. "He's the man who chased half a dozen of the worst cutthroats in the world off of my prostrate form, and put them all to flight. Oh, I've a big little story to tell you presently. But, first of all, come along and meet my new friend."

"I'll be his friend, too, if he has served you, Danny boy," responded Dave Darrin, as he nearly overtook his brother officer.

"Oh, Señor, have the kindness to wait a moment, won't you?" asked Dalzell, overtaking a short but decidedly stout little man. "I wish to make you acquainted with one of my brother officers. I wish him to know you."

The little man gave one an impression of great modesty, for he said, in a low voice:

"Then let us step away here, out of the crowd, if you insist on singing my praises."

Saying which, the stranger turned a corner, stepping past several doors on the little side street and halting in the shadow of a doorway.

"Señor Gorgo," announced Dalzell, as soon as Dave had caught up with them, "I wish to introduce to you a chum who has grown up with me, or I with him, since we were first youngsters at school. Señor Pasquale Gorgo, Ensign David Darrin, of the United States Navy."

"I am highly honored," murmured Señor Gorgo, bowing with grace as he held out a hand to Dave.

"The honor and the pleasure are mine, if I am permitted to clasp the hand of one who has served my friend, which I understand, Señor, you have done to-night," replied Dave earnestly.

"You overwhelm me, for I did nothing or next to nothing," murmured Señor Gorgo, with a smile that betrayed the presence of beautifully white teeth. The man's whole personality radiated amiability. Dave felt a warm regard at once for this stout little man.

"You did next to nothing, eh?" Dan repeated bluntly. "Señor, I have sometimes been called a very fair boxer, and something of a rough-and-tumble fighter, at need, but that gang of negroes and Portuguese, or whatever they were, were too much for me. For a few seconds I pounded them a bit; then they rushed me and had me down. In another ten seconds I believe they would have killed me. Just in the nick of time you appeared. You didn't waste a bit of breath in talking, but just sailed in right and left. The way you scattered those rascals was a marvel to me, and I thought that, in my knocking around the world as a sailor, I had seen some lively street fighting at that."

"It wasn't valor," protested Señor Gorgo, smilingly. "It didn't require any fighting ability; I have but little of that. The scoundrels, taken by surprise, by the suddenness of my ap-

pearance, knew that you would be on your feet in another instant, and that you would be busy pummeling them."

"Listen to the man!" laughed Dan.

"In this instance, Señor," said Dave, turning to Gorgo, "I know that I can give no offence in preferring to believe the tale of my brother officer. Dalzell is not easily carried off his feet by exhibitions of ordinary courage, and if he was struck by the daring and skill of your fight, then I am convinced that he had abundant cause for his sincere admiration for your performance."

Señor Gorgo was able to receive even this hearty testimony with becoming modesty.

"*Caballeros* (gentlemen), if my friends, who have known me for years, were to hear you they would be highly amused. They do not regard me as a fighting man. The utmost I am able to claim is that I love peace so much that, perhaps, sometimes I might be willing to fight for it."

Dave soon fell to surveying Dan's uniform again with marked disapproval. Both wore the neat, tropical uniform — white duck trousers, with white blouse, trimmed at collar, front and hem with white braid, and the whole topped with white, visored cap. For footgear, both young officers wore white buckskin Oxfords.

On the Isthmus of Panama, Army and Navy officers are expected to exercise the greatest care

in their personal appearance. Their uniforms must be spick and span. Here at the Isthmus more than thirty nations are well represented. The inhabitants, both those of Spanish and of native blood, are much impressed by display of handsome military and naval uniforms.

Now, Dan's uniform was certainly the "sight" that Darrin had called it when he met his chum in the spa on Ancon Street. Dan had dropped in for just an instant, to get a cooling drink before making fast time to a restaurant, where he had left a suit-case on coming ashore. That suit-case contained a complete change of clothing.

"Señor," Dave remarked when there came a lull in the conversation, "my friend Dalzell's uniform, as you have seen, is covered with mud and dust. It is highly important that he should get into more becoming clothing at the earliest moment. He left his suit-case at a place in Ancon Street, which is less than three minutes' walk from here. Will it suit your pleasure to walk there with us?"

"It would delight me," murmured Señor Gorgo, bowing courteously, "but unfortunately I have a matter on hand that must be attended to. Fifteen minutes is all the time that I shall need. I shall be about to-night, and shall hope to meet you again. Until then — permit me — accept every assurance of my highest regard, and *adios!*"

As gracefully as before, Gorgo shook hands with both young officers, smiled and started off.

"He's a regular brick," declared Dalzell enthusiastically.

"I like him," said Dave simply. "For that matter, I believe I would admire any fellow who can fight as you described. And, of course, I would have a double liking for the man who had put up a gallant fight in your behalf, Danny boy."

In a short time the two young naval officers had entered the restaurant. There Dan secured his suit-case and retired to an inner room, from which he soon came out, looking as fine a specimen of the young American naval officer as the most ardent patriot would wish to see.

The evening was still young, and Colon, at the Atlantic entrance of the Panama Canal, was ablaze with light and astir with pleasure seekers. Uncle Sam's soldiers and sailors were much in evidence in the street throngs.

From every side came the sounds of music and revelry. Moving picture shows, cafés and dance halls abounded everywhere. Now and then Dave and Dan halted long enough to stand at some doorway, peeping in at the revelry.

"I believe we would enjoy ourselves a whole lot more if Gorgo were with us," murmured Ensign Dalzell. "I wonder where he is."

"Undoubtedly he is attending strictly to affairs of his own," Darrin suggested.

"I wish he'd show up. He said that he'd find us soon. Dave, I've taken a great liking to that chap."

"So have I," assented Darrin. "And I feel very sure, though I cannot tell you why, that we are going to see a great deal more of him."

"I hope you're right," murmured Dan. "And I hope that the continuance of the acquaintance begins within the next quarter of an hour."

"Here are old friends!" cried a merry voice, as, a little later, Dan stood before a counter in a confectioner's store waiting for another ice cream soda to be prepared.

The two young ensigns turned to find themselves smilingly confronted by Lieutenant Henderson, of the Marine Corps, an officer whom they had first met months before. With Henderson was a young Army officer whom Henderson introduced as Lieutenant Miller of the artillery arm of the service.

"Have an ice cream soda, do," begged Danny Grin, and both military men accepted. Then Miller proposed that they go around to one of the clubs and enjoy a quiet hour. As Dalzell had given up all hopes of seeing Señor Gorgo again that evening, the invitation was accepted by the ensigns.

It was much later when Dave and Dan, bidding their service friends good night, started once more down Ancon Street toward the Navy moles.

They had gone a few blocks, and were crossing the street, when an automobile suddenly whizzed around the nearest corner.

"Look out, Dave!" yelled Ensign Dan, who had just gained the sidewalk.

Darrin, caught in the middle of the street, turned just in time to see the bright "eyes" of the rushing car glaring at him, the machine seemingly almost at his elbow.

Appearing with the suddenness of an apparition, a man darted out into the roadway, yelling, and throwing up both hands.

Just in the nick of time the car swerved to the middle of the road and dashed on.

"You had a narrow escape, my friend!" called the cheery voice of the man who had caused the driver to swerve.

"You, Señor Gorgo?" cried Dave, recognizing in him the man whose prompt action had probably saved his life. "First Dalzell owed you his life, and now I do."

"Not quite so bad as that," responded Señor Gorgo, laughing.

"I believe that car would have run me down, if it hadn't been for you; its approach was so swift and so unexpected," said Dave.

"Nonsense! You are a service man, and your trained presence of mind would have come to your rescue," laughed the señor, "even if I did do something that turned out well only because of a fool's luck. In any event, my dear Darrin, I am heartily glad to see you again and to know that you are safe."

"You were born to be a rescuing angel," declared Dalzell. "Just in the nick of time, Señor, you appear whenever a friend is menaced."

"If I am always as fortunate as I have been to-night," smiled the Latin, "I shall indeed live a happy life."

"And a short one, too, I fear," rejoined Dan. "I am afraid the chances you take may not always have as happy an issue."

"I do not know how it happened that I was fortunate enough to be on hand," Señor Gorgo declared, "but I am thankful for being here — that is, if my being here really helped in a moment of danger."

"We are walking down to the mole," Dave said. "Would it suit your pleasure, Señor, to stroll that far with us? And to-morrow we would like to invite you on board the 'Panama.'"

"I shall be delighted to visit your ship, some day," replied Señor Gorgo, "but just at this moment I have a duty to perform for an old friend that will prevent my going with you."

"Then we'll surely try to keep out of trouble," rejoined Dan, with one of the grins that had made him famous. "Without Señor Gorgo at hand Panama doesn't appear to be a safe place for us."

Gracefully, yet hurriedly, the señor left them protesting his belief that he would have the great pleasure of seeing the young officers again on the morrow if their fate brought them ashore on the coming day.

"I like that chap better every time I meet him," declared Dan heartily, as he and his chum resumed their walk.

"One can't help liking a fellow who never turns up except to render one a great service," Dave replied gaily.

By the time that the young officers reached the mole their watches told them that it lacked twenty minutes of the hour.

After the bright lights of the teeming little city the absence of any lights on the mole, save signal lanterns for boat handlers, was a decided relief to the eyes.

At one of the darkest corners of the mole Dave stood leaning over a snubbing post, looking seaward, while Dalzell went down the steps to the landing stage.

Among our readers Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell have long been famous. The acquaint-

ance began in the first volume of the "GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS SERIES," which deals with the earliest adventures of Dick & Co., as six energetic and ambitious Gridley schoolboys were known. Dick Prescott was leader of that group of six, and Dave Darrin was his right-hand chum. The doings of Dick & Co. were further set forth in the "HIGH SCHOOL BOYS SERIES," at which time the six developed themselves in athletics, in hopes and in manhood. Our readers further followed these boys through the pages of the "HIGH SCHOOL BOYS VACATION SERIES."

With high school days over, Dick Prescott and Greg Holmes entered the United States Military Academy at West Point, as army cadets, and what befell them there is stirringly related in the four volumes of the "WEST POINT SERIES." Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell secured appointments as midshipmen at the United States Naval Academy, and their life there is spiritedly set forth in the "ANNAPOLIS SERIES." Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton, after leaving high school, went into the great field of engineering, and their adventures in many parts of the continent are told in the "YOUNG ENGINEERS SERIES."

The present series, as our readers know, deals with the lives of Dave and Dan as younger officers in the United States Navy. The first volume, full of fighting and of plots and counter-

plots, is published under the title, "Dave Darrin at Vera Cruz." The second volume, no less absorbing in interest, is published under the title, "Dave Darrin on Mediterranean Service," and deals with the part our young officers played in solving one of the most thrilling mysteries of a plot to involve two great countries in a big and disastrous war.

Our young officers were next assigned to the fleet that was forming for imperative duty in South American waters.

"Into what events will the present cruise lead?" Dave wondered, as he eyed the sea wistfully. "What new troubles will spring up in this hot, moist part of the world? Of late years it has seemed that the American Navy, for thirty years so peaceful, has sprung into an institution that serves a country always on the verge of war. The sending of the 'Panama' down here, on its way to the South American station, when a small cruiser would ordinarily serve as well, makes me feel certain that there is some new bit of international mischief brewing. All Latin America seems shivering with the dread of war. What enemies can these South Americans fear? Surely not any power in Europe, for all Europe has its own absorbing troubles in the great war there. Not the people of the great United States. Yet whenever our Navy men go ashore in a South

American country they are regarded with very evident hatred. Every few days a steamship puts in at some South American port with a new cargo of arms and ammunition. Enough rifles have been shipped to South America, within the last three years, to set the world ablaze with war. Why arms for hundreds, yes, thousands of regiments? Why so many cannon and automatic guns? Can these people of South America be secretly preparing for a war of which no whisper has yet reached other parts of the world? And why are so many more of our warships sent to South American waters than formerly? We do not go to fight, for we have done no fighting. Then we are sent for the purpose of watching, and why watching should be necessary on our part in this quarter of the world only a few well-posted men in Washington know. True, it may be that Washington and these South American countries have some knowledge as to what the winners of the big war in Europe may be planning to attempt, after the present war, in the way of repaying themselves by grabbing territory down in this part of the world. Whew! What a rumpus that would raise! Then the United States Navy *would* be busy. But that doesn't seem exactly likely, either. The winners in Europe will be almost as much exhausted as the vanquished. Oh, it's all a riddle — or a nightmare!"

Dave, as he voiced the puzzle of naval activities to himself, stood regarding the huge, powerful "Panama" with pride in his eyes.

"Mooning?" Dan called up teasingly to his brother in arms.

"No; merely thinking," Dave smiled back.

"What's the difference?" Dalzell inquired, with a shrug of his shoulders that he had learned in Genoa.

Dave did not answer audibly, but went on with his silent attempts to find a clue to the puzzle that he had been trying to solve.

As he stood there he noted that the launch was leaving the "Panama's" side and heading toward shore. Presently, with a sharp churning of water by propeller and rudder, the launch came in alongside the stage.

Not a little noise resulted from the operation. Dave turned away from the snubbing post, then, with a start, discovered standing at his side a bare-footed, thinly-garbed, smiling young negro.

"Good evening, Marster," greeted the young negro, in English, with the soft intonation of the West India negro. "I think, Marster, you must be the one I was sent to find. You are from Señor Gorgo?"

"I left him only a few minutes ago," Dave replied.

"Then this is for you, Marster," announced the negro, pressing into Dave Darrin's hands a small, oblong package.

"For me?" Dave asked, astonished.

"Yes, Marster. Sh! Not so loud, Marster! Sh! If you please, Marster. Señor Gorgo said you would know all about it."

"But I'm afraid I don't know anything about it," rejoined Darrin.

With a low-toned "Good night, Marster," the negro had already sped away on nimble feet.

"Some little remembrance, or trifling souvenir from the señor, I take it," murmured the ensign. Still holding the package, he descended the steps and boarded the launch with Dalzell.

"Did you find something on the mole?" asked Dan, eying Dave's hand as the launch started.

"Oh, I nearly forgot all about this package," Dave uttered, glancing down at it. "A negro boy brought it to me and said it was from Señor Gorgo."

"What's in the package?" Dan inquired.

"I really haven't an idea as to what it contains."

"Then wouldn't it be well to open the package now?" Dan suggested.

"If you wish, but why not wait until we are aboard?"

Dan assenting to this suggestion, nothing more was said about the package. Going up over the side of the battleship, and reporting their return to the officer of the deck, both young naval officers went to their quarters.

"I'll be over to see you directly," Dan called softly, as he paused before his own door. Two minutes later he had entered Dave's cabin.

"Well, well, well!" Dalzell uttered reproachfully. "Surely no one will ever be able to call you over-curious."

"What's wrong now?" Dave wanted to know.

"Why, there's the Gorgo package on your desk. You haven't made a move to open it."

"I felt that you ought to be in on the surprise," Dave smiled, picking up the little parcel and breaking the string that bound it. Taking off a couple folds of paper, Dave asked smilingly: "What's your guess, Dan?"

"I haven't one," Dalzell retorted. "I'm waiting for the answer."

Smiling at his chum's impatience, Dave tore off the rest of the paper, disclosing a plush box.

"Jewelry?" snorted Dan. "That's a fine thing to send a Navy officer!"

"Perhaps it isn't so bad as that," smiled Darrin, fumbling at the catch. "But we'll soon know. Oh — ow —"

"Wow!" finished Dan Dalzell explosively.

As Dave Darrin held the opened box up under the electric light both young officers vented astonished gasps.

"What can the man mean?" demanded Dave, with a troubled face.

"It must be phony," Danny Grin suggested.

"If you mean that the thing in the box is counterfeit, or imitation," declared Dave, "you may be right, though I doubt it."

"Let's have another peep," begged Dan.

Again Dave opened the box and took therefrom a piece of jewelry so splendid that it dazzled the eyes of both young officers.

It was a jeweled cross, the shaft ablaze with diamonds, the cross piece studded with rubies.

"I don't believe there is anything counterfeit about these stones," declared Darrin, scrutinizing the piece closely.

It was not such a cross as even the richest would wear for devotional purposes. It looked, rather, like the costly bauble of a spoiled society woman.

"What on earth could Señor Gorgo have meant by sending you such a costly gift?" asked Dan.

"Perhaps it was intended for you, as you were Gorgo's earlier acquaintance," Darrin smiled. "The messenger didn't even ask my name."

"It was handed to you, so it must be yours," Dan returned. "One thing is certain. It couldn't

have been intended for both of us, for there is no way of dividing such a gift."

"You may have another guess," Dave offered.

"Do you mean that it's mine?"

"No, sir. I mean that this cross is very evidently the property of Señor Gorgo. If I can possibly get shore leave to-morrow forenoon I shall scour Colon and the Isthmus of Panama, if necessary, until I find him and return this to him."

"That's the only thing to be done," Dan agreed promptly. "And, if you can do it without offense, I'd make him explain how he ever came to send you a diamond and ruby cross worth — Say, how much do you suppose that thing *is* worth, anyway?"

"I can't even make a guess," Dave murmured, holding the beautiful trinket up to the light. "The value must run away up into the thousands of dollars. Probably I'm not making such a wild guess when I estimate this cross to be worth thirty or forty thousand dollars."

"No one but a fool would press a gift of such value, even if appropriate, upon a new acquaintance," maintained Danny Grin, seriously. "Whatever else Señor Pasquale Gorgo may be, he certainly is no fool."

"Then what could have been his motive in sending me this costly thing?" Dave queried.

"I'm more than half inclined to the belief

that there was no motive whatever," Dan Dalzell went on. "I think it more likely that there was a mistake and that the negro delivered the package to the wrong person."

"I've begun, also, to think that," responded Darrin. "Now, Danny boy, what do you say if we turn in? In the morning we'll put up a strenuous plea for a few hours ashore. If we get it, we'll find Señor Gorgo and make him talk."

So the two young ensigns were presently sound asleep in their respective berths, not even dreaming of Señor Gorgo's costly token, nor with any suspicion of the trouble into which the jeweled cross was likely to plunge them.

CHAPTER II

A PUZZLE AND A HOODOO

DAVE awoke in the morning with a start, and leaped from his berth. If he had any trouble on his mind it was soon dissipated, for he found the dazzling trinket just where he had put it for safe keeping the night before.

Both young officers had forgotten it, but this was pay-day, and, therefore, the excuse for shore leave came as an automatic necessity. Both had

need, along with several of their brother officers, to go ashore to one or another of the banks in the town for the purpose of sending money home.

So it fell out that Dave and Dan found themselves ashore in Colon before ten o'clock.

They walked quickly to one of the principal American banks of the city.

Just as they neared one of the windows, while chatting in undertones, they heard a clerk say:

"Here is the statement of your account, showing your balance with us, Señor Gorgo, which is certainly large enough to give any man a sense of comfort."

"Thank you," replied Pasquale Gorgo, pocketing a folded sheet of paper that had been handed him. "My compliments to you, and to the bank with which you are connected."

Then he turned away from the window to come face to face with the young officers whom he had so greatly mystified the night before.

Danny Grin's first impulse was to leap at Señor Gorgo, mouth wide open, and to ask, in a rush, an explanation of the enigma of the jeweled cross. But Dave's severe composure saved Dalzell from making himself ridiculous.

"Good morning, Señor," was Darrin's polite greeting. "We are heartily glad to see you."

"And I am delighted beyond words at meeting my young friends again," responded Gorgo.

Behind the counter a messenger hastened to the side of the clerk at the window.

"Oh, one moment, Señor Gorgo!" begged the clerk, after a word with the messenger. "We nearly forgot to hand you this other paper. That is surely neglectful, especially in the case of so old and valued a customer as you have been."

With a smile that waved aside apology, Gorgo accepted and placed the second sheet of paper in his pocket.

"We have just a few moments' business here, Señor," Dave said, "and then we shall beg you to favor us with your company for a while."

"Your request makes me wholly happy," declared Gorgo, with a gracious smile. "Do not hurry yourselves, *Caballeros*. After your business is finished I shall be glad to devote the next hour to your service."

Dave promptly purchased a draft payable to his wife, now home in Gridley, while Dan purchased a draft for his mother. Each draft was folded and placed inside a letter with the envelope stamped and addressed. Then, ready to mail their letters, the two young officers turned to join Señor Pasquale Gorgo.

"Why, Señor Gorgo is not here," uttered Dan.

"We shall find him waiting for us outside," Dave responded, full of simple faith in the sacredness of a gentleman's engagement.

But the young naval officers reached the street only to find that their new friend was not in sight. Mailing their letters, they now made a systematic search of the immediate neighborhood.

"He has vanished," said Dan resentfully; "faded out of sight."

"It ought not to take us long to find him," replied Dave. "The bank people may know where he had gone."

But at the teller's window another disappointment was encountered.

"We haven't the least idea of Señor Gorgo's address," replied the teller. "The Señor has had many addresses. The only one we know at present is, the Isthmus of Panama."

"But we must find him, I tell you," insisted Dave. "It is very important."

"I wish you luck, gentlemen," smiled the teller, "and that's the truth. You may locate him within five minutes — and you may not find him in five weeks. Pasquale Gorgo is one of the most elusive men ever on the Isthmus."

"Has he no friends here?" asked Dave.

"Hosts of them," smiled the teller.

"Would it be betraying confidence if you should give me the names and addresses of a few?"

"Not at all," smiled the teller, passing Ensign Darrin a pencil and slip of paper. "I'll mention some of Pasquale Gorgo's friends and acquaint-

ances, as I know them, and you may note down such as you like."

Nimbly Dave's fingers flew, taking the dictation. At last he had his slip of paper covered with writing.

"Thank you ever so much," he cried warmly. "And now I'll go on the trail. Come along, Dan, and let us see which one can find a taxicab first."

Within two minutes Dave and Dan had found a vehicle, close to the bank. Barely had they begun their ride up the street to one of the well-known clubs when Señor Gorgo, smiling and cool as ever, re-entered the bank.

"Have you encountered Messrs. Darrin and Dalzell, of the Navy?" asked the teller.

"I met them on this spot," replied Señor Gorgo, "and promised to see them again. That is the reason for my return. Do you know anything of the matter about which they wish to see me?"

"I don't," replied the clerk, shaking his head. "All I know is what Mr. Darrin told me."

"And what was that?" demanded Pasquale Gorgo, eagerly.

"Mr. Darrin said he wanted to see you upon a matter of great importance," replied the teller.

"On a matter of great importance?" repeated Pasquale Gorgo, and to the teller's mind the man before his window showed for an instant an

appearance of fright. Just as quickly, however, Señor Gorgo recovered himself, the color returned to his face, and he became the carelessly good-humored, smiling man that he usually was.

"Oh, well," he said, "I shall make every effort to find the young gentlemen at once. Should they return here, and have not found me in the meantime, will you be good enough to tell them that I shall look for them at the Isthmus Club at half an hour after noon, and that I shall beg them to do me the honor of taking luncheon with me?"

The teller noted on a slip of paper the details of Gorgo's instructions.

"I shall gladly tell them, Señor, if I see them," the teller assured the stout little man.

Once out in the street Señor Gorgo appeared to lose some of the assurance that he had forced himself to assume while in the bank.

"So they want to see me on a matter of great importance, eh?" the stout little man asked himself. "*Great* importance, is it? Br-r-r-r-r!"

And, though the nearest thermometer registered a heat of one hundred and twelve degrees, Pasquale Gorgo permitted himself, briefly, the luxury of a shiver.

"*Great* importance, is it?" he again demanded, as he darted into a doorway, drew out a key and admitted himself to a shuttered house. "Then,

indeed I trust that the young gentlemen go to the Isthmus Club at the appointed time and that they remain there all afternoon waiting for me."

After a hopeless search by taxicab that cost several dollars, Ensigns Dave and Dan bethought themselves of making a return to the bank.

There the teller gave them the instructions left by Señor Gorgo.

"We'll go there at once," cried Dave. "I trust that we shall not be too late."

Out into the street they hurried, just in time to hear several long blasts from a deep-throated marine whistle, followed by a series of short yelpings from a siren.

"That's a concert by the band in the engineer's department on the 'Panama'," declared Dan, halting with one foot on the step of the taxicab.

"Just that, I am afraid," Dave agreed. "Yes; there it goes once more."

"The recall to ship," Dan continued, in an injured tone. "And that, too, just as we were on the point of finding Mr. Gorgo and securing the answer to the riddle of that exasperating jeweled cross!"

Dave darted into the bank to tell the teller that they were obliged to return to the ship at once, asking him to urge Señor Gorgo to send word out to the ship, making an appointment to meet them.

Once in the taxicab, the young officers reached the mole in fast time.

"It looks like swift sailing orders," Dan observed.

"At any rate, I trust we don't have to sail until we've had a few words with Señor Gorgo, and have handed him back his souvenir," muttered Dave.

"With that off our minds," agreed Danny Grin, "I don't care how quickly we sail away from this hot spot."

Again the recall sounded from the Panama's deep-throated whistle.

Arrived at the mole, and taking their places in a launch, Dave and Dan then waited twenty minutes until the first shore-leave parties of sailormen and marines arrived.

Then, with only a lieutenant left behind on the pier to take charge of any laggards who should report for the next trip, the launch glided across the waters and delivered its human cargo aboard the huge battleship.

"Hustle into sea-togs and report to the executive officer for your orders," came the brusque instructions from Lieutenant Commander Miller, just then officer of the deck.

"Then we've sailing orders?" asked Darrin.

"Yes," came the quick answer, as the officer of the deck turned to other duties.

Though the change to sea-togs was quickly accomplished, the young officers had to wait outside of the executive officer's quarters a few minutes, while older and superior officers received their orders.

"Say," murmured Dave in Dalzell's ear, as they waited, "we needn't bother ourselves any more about that infernal hoodoo of a jeweled cross, if only we can secure permission to send the package and a note ashore by messenger on the next launch trip. The messenger can leave both at Gorgo's bank, which, no doubt, will receive packages or mail to be delivered to him."

"Great idea," greeted Danny Grin.

As soon as Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell had reported and had received their orders from the executive officer, Dave once more saluted, gravely asking:

"Sir, have we permission to send a valuable package ashore with a note to one of the banks? The package came into our possession through mistake, and it is important to send it back to its owner."

"You have my permission, Ensign Darrin," replied the executive officer, Commander Crosston, "if the officer of the deck sees his way clear to grant the request. Report to Lieutenant Commander Miller that such is my instruction. You have my permission, time permitting."

"Thank you, sir," Darrin answered, and both ensigns hastened away.

"Dan, you go and arrange things with Miller while I hustle the package into wrapping paper and scribble a hasty note to the bank," Dave directed.

Accordingly Dan presented himself on deck with the request, respectfully made of Mr. Miller.

"It can't be done," Miller answered jerkily. "The launch is already putting off with the last of the liberty men on board. The instant that launch reaches the ship she'll be hoisted up over the side. You're assigned to bridge watch with me, Ensign Dalzell. Report there at once, and take your post and command at that point until I join you, sir."

Crestfallen, but realizing very well that the business of the Great United States could not wait for private affairs, Dan hastened away. Meeting Dave, who came out, package in hand, Dan quickly told him of the fruitless outcome of the request.

"I had always supposed before," sighed Dave Darrin, "that it was the easiest thing in the world to rid one's self of money or jewels But now I can see, quite clearly, that these hoodoo diamonds and rubies are fated to stay by me."

CHAPTER III

THE FACE FROM THE BUSH

"IT would do Dick Prescott real good to see these chaps," grinned Dan Dalzell.

"You mean it would give him nervous prostration," amended Dave Darrin.

"Where on earth could one find 'soldiers' like these?" Dan demanded.

"In almost any South American republic, I imagine," replied Dave. "Down here, among these strange people, war is often open-air comic opera, but when it is real war it is so grim and so cruel that people look only at soldiers' rifles and never stop to look at their uniforms."

"But these fellows don't even observe the conventions of the military spirit," insisted Ensign Dalzell, in an injured tone. "Look at the little runts, and the tall, lean fellows. Look at that man's bent shoulders. Why, he's almost a hunchback. Such fellows can't even attempt to preserve the straightness of a military line. Just imagine such fellows trying to march in regimental front. Faugh!"

The two young naval officers, having just come ashore in uniform, were standing at the edge of a field on which were encamped three thousand soldiers of the republic of Vengara.

Southward the huge "Panama" had made her way, on most important business that was really understood by but few officers and none of the men on the great fighting ship.

For some years the republic of Vengara, vast in area, and containing some five millions of people, had gone on peacefully under the sway of President Rova.

That was after the former cruel, tyrannical ruler, Benedito, had been driven from power by a popular revolution.

Rova was not without his faults, but was a more efficient official than the former president. Vengara had enjoyed peace, and industries and commerce had flourished. American and European capitalists had invested large amounts of money in developing the great natural resources of the country. Not alone were the greatest money centers interested in the peace and prosperity of Vengara. From Peru, Chili, the Argentine Republic and Brazil, money had poured in.

Vengara had flourished. Her capitalists were thriving; the merchants had become rich, and the small traders were developing into merchants of considerable consequence.

On all sides President Rova had been hailed as the great man and the successful ruler of his people. The republic, during the last few years, had borrowed huge sums of money abroad, on which the interest had been regularly paid.

It was just becoming apparent that only the surface resources of Vengara had been touched.

During his exile, ex-President Benedito had lived abroad, enjoying the very considerable wealth that he had filched from his countrymen before he had been driven from power.

Now, after years, the world was suddenly taking notice of a change of spirit in Vengara.

As in too many of the Latin-American countries, the poorest toilers had never been treated with justice. It was difficult or impossible for them to secure and hold land. It was difficult for the poor peon, as the laborer is called, to enforce the payment of wages for work done.

The peons of Vengara were now restless. There were mutterings in the air. Expert workmen received good pay, but the unskilled toiler had much of which to complain. It was all he could do to get food enough to keep him in health and strength.

Like a flash, one morning, the world learned from its newspapers that Benedito had vanished from his haunts in Europe.

Known friends of Benedito had become sud-

denly active in various parts of the world. Consignments of arms had been mysteriously purchased, and it was known that tramp steamers bound to South America had taken on large cargoes of arms and ammunition.

It did not take those familiar with South American affairs long to conclude with reasonable certainty that José Benedito had found the time ripe for stirring up a revolution in Vengara. And this suspicion had been suddenly confirmed by the appearance of proclamations in public places, throughout the republic, calling upon the people to rise and throw off the rule of President Rova.

The effects of such a revolution would be world-wide. Benedito was known to be an ambitious man. If the former tyrant should come back to power he was more than likely to plunge the greater part of South America into war.

With Benedito back in the presidential chair, foreign investors would no longer feel that their capital was safe. The great banking houses which had supplied the foreign loans would be doubtful about the national debt of Vengara ever being paid.

In a word, if Benedito should return as president and dictator of Vengara, war would follow, with its bloody strife, and the money centers of the world would be so badly disturbed as to include the likelihood of general panic in the financial world.

Hence the "Panama's" sudden visit to the coast as soon as information had been received from Washington that the ex-dictator was about to break the peace of his country.

Already some of Benedito's former generals had issued a call for troops to rise and bring about the overthrow of President Rova, and it was reported that two of them had assembled eighteen thousand men under arms at a point in the hills, seventy miles from the coast.

"On to Corima!" was the cry of the revolutionists. Corima was the capital of the republic.

The field in which Dave and Dan now stood glancing over the encampment of three thousand of the president's soldiers, adjoined the port of La Choya, which means literally, "the jack-daw."

La Choya was not a large town; it contained not more than sixty buildings, including those of the railway that connected it with the capital. The harbor was little better than an open roadstead; ships anchored off the shore and discharged their cargoes into lighters, or *bancas*.

Nearly all the houses in La Choya were low, one-story affairs, with corrugated iron roofs, painted red.

It was only the scenery that made La Choya a spot of beauty. Avenues of tall, graceful palms

traced their way through the little town and reached out into the country. The land was undulating. No less than seven little tidewater streams rushed onward to the sea.

"Pretty poor sort of soldiers," observed Dan, after a pause.

"Poor?" echoed Dave. "Yes, poor in purse, tattered in appearance, and gaunt of body. But these fellows, when their hearts are in the struggle, can fight like fiends!"

"I'd think it a cinch to lead two hundred of our sailormen against the entire three thousand Vengaran soldiers on this plain," chuckled Dan.

"Then," retorted Ensign Darrin solemnly, "I hope that you may never have an independent military command until you are blessed with better military sense. In a country like Vengara war is indeed a loathsome thing, for it is cruel from start to finish."

"Any war is cruel," said Dan with emphasis.

"But tenfold more so among such a people as the Vengarans," Dave affirmed. "Nor is it the soldiers alone who may lose life heavily in such a country as this. The non-fighting men — even women and children — are likely also to lose their lives through sheer, wanton murder."

"Murder?" echoed Dalzell, aghast.

"Yes, murder," Dave went on, firmly. "What less can you call it? If civil war breaks loose in this country any victorious military commander can order non-combatants to execution without any semblance of law. The poor condemned wretches are merely lined up and shot. It's horrible, Danny, the power that one man may have over another's life here. General Belasco is in command of this division. He may be a true and fine man, but, again, he may not be. Suppose he defeats the rebels. Among the prisoners taken he may find two or three men whom he considers his enemies. What does he do? He condemns them to be shot."

"But surely an appeal can be taken to President Rova," Dan objected.

"Any one who dared make an appeal against a successful general might, of course, hurry to President Rova with it," Dave admitted. "The president might even be persuaded to issue an order against such executions. But what good would that do?"

"Why not?" Dan demanded.

"Because the condemned would be shot as soon as condemned."

"That isn't right," Dan exclaimed.

"Of course it isn't, but that is the way war is carried on in this country. Some little town might be defended with obstinacy by the rebels.

Belasco, or one of his subordinates, enraged by the resistance, might order all of the captured enemy and all the men of the town, who had not been fighting, to be lined up and shot."

"If Belasco and the other loyal generals are fellows of that stamp," answered Dan indignantly, "then it ought to be better to have Benedito succeed in his revolution and overthrow such a murderous government."

"Benedito, from his past record, would be a hundred times worse than Rova or any of the loyal generals," Dave retorted. "Dan, whichever side wins, that side is going to shoot up all the captured forces, and at the same time innocent non-combatants, accused of treason, also will be lined up and shot without mercy."

"Then these people are not fit to have a government of their own," declared Dalzell, wrathily.

"That's my opinion, too," Dave rejoined, with a shrug of his shoulders. "But what are we going to do about it? The worst of the South American republics, as well as the best of them, are sovereign peoples, and a country like the United States can interfere only in the interests of the world's peace. And Europe can't interfere at all, for Uncle Sam, holding to the Monroe Doctrine, denies the right of any European Power to interfere at all, lest that Power be tempted to seek perma-

nent possessions here. For that very reason, when a revolution starts in any country to the south of the United States, the Navy must be represented, and it must do police duty and protect the property and lives of Americans and Europeans. For any one of these absurd 'generals' thinks nothing at all of executing any foreigner whom he believes, suspects or dreams may be hostile to him, even in thought."

"But Uncle Sam can demand satisfaction, and insist upon it," declared Dan rather hotly.

"Uncle Sam always has been extremely weak in dealing with the countries to the south of us," Dave replied sadly. "Besides, if we try to jack up a government general for the murder of Americans, he has a commission appointed to look into the matter, and presently Uncle Sam is solemnly assured that the deceased came to their deaths at the hands of the revolutionary forces. Or, a rebel leader is able to prove that the Americans slain by his order were really butchered by the government troops. Always there is plenty of perjured testimony to back up such atrocious acts."

"We ought to clean out such a country!" flared Ensign Dalzell.

"If we do so," smiled Dave grimly, "we are accused of the very barbarities that we denounce. There seems to be no help for it."

"On board ship," Dan remarked, "I heard one older officer telling another that we are here for the purpose of helping President Rova."

"And that is largely true," Dave nodded. "We are not here to fight for Rova; and if we did, it would only solidify the Vengarans around Benedito, for these natives are as proud as they are poor and unhappy, and they would rally against either faction that was allied with the United States. Our real purpose here, at present, as I understand it, is to overhaul any vessel trying to make this coast, to search that vessel, and to arrest Benedito if he be found aboard. For, according to the best information, Benedito has not yet landed, but is looked for at any hour now. If we get him, and hold him prisoner, then the rebels now in the field will be disheartened, and will be easily defeated by President Rova's government troops. But if Benedito slips into the country and once reaches his rebel army, his eighteen thousand men will rapidly swell to sixty thousand, and the rebellion will be on with all its menace to Vengara and to the peace of South America and to the finances of the world. This is, for a great many reasons, by far the most important South American revolution that Uncle Sam has ever been forced to take a hand in."

By this time the sun had set. In the tropics night falls in a very few minutes afterward.

"I wonder what can be keeping Captain Potter so long," muttered Dan.

"Undoubtedly he has a lot of detail to arrange with General Belasco," Dave answered.

For more than an hour the young ensigns had been sauntering about at this same spot. Captain Potter and Lieutenant Commander Bellas had gone up to the government general's headquarters. Dave and Dan had been ordered on shore, but had been instructed not to go out of sight of the launch, lying some hundred yards off shore.

The government troops, of whom there were hundreds lounging about in sight, wore, or most of them did, uniforms of tattered light blue drilling. Their headgear consisted of the cheapest description of high-crowned straw hats. Footgear they had none, and but few wore underclothing. Altogether they looked a woe-begone lot. That such men can fight desperately, however, is known to all students of South American affairs.

"You'd think these fellows would feel envious," observed Dan, "when they see our sleek, well-fed, splendidly uniformed sailormen and marines."

"These men," smiled Dave, "know that they are poorer than our fighting men, but they con-

sider themselves as being vastly superior to us in everything except wealth. These Vengarans, for instance, know how well they can fight, and they consider us cowards because we never fight them."

"We ought to fight them just once," uttered Dan grimly, "just to give these fellows something new to think about."

"You're growing bloodthirsty, Dan," his comrade rebuked him, rather gaily. "What we need here in South America, is more wisdom instead of more fighting."

"I know just the fellow whom I'd like to see tackle this big job," Dalzell said enthusiastically. "He has the nerve, and I believe he would have the wisdom. If I could have my way I'd set him up at once as the new President of Vengara."

"And who is that man?" inquired Dave Darrin, as they neared a dense clump of shubbery that surrounded the trunks of two banana palms.

"Señor Pasquale Gorgo!" exclaimed Dan. "I'd back him every time to do the thing that's needed in any South American republic that has need of a wise man."

"Did I hear my name mentioned?" inquired a soft voice.

Both young officers started.

Peering out of the miniature jungle, only his head showing in the gathering darkness, stood he of the diamond and ruby cross!

CHAPTER IV

SETTING A TRAP FOR A DICTATOR

"YOU, Señor Gorgo?" demanded Dave Darrin delightedly.

"We've been eager to see you again," breathed Danny Grin enthusiastically.

"I must begin at once by asking a great favor," declared Pasquale Gorgo.

"Name it," begged Dan.

"Come closer to this bit of jungle, *caballeros*, and turn your backs upon me. Talk in low tones, and point to the sky or to distant objects," requested Gorgo.

"You must have a very good reason for asking us to converse with you under such conditions as you mention," answered Dave Darrin shrewdly.

"I have, indeed, strong, almost urgent reasons," assented Gorgo, as the two young ensigns turned their backs to him.

"Permit me to ask a question, then," said Dave, "which you may answer, or not, as best suits your pleasure."

"I am waiting," bowed Gorgo.

"Have you any connection with the revolution that is now starting in Vengara?"

"I?" demanded Pasquale Gorgo. "Not the least in the world! But I have financial interests at stake."

"Your financial interests do not in any way depend upon the success of the revolution?" Dave persisted.

"My concerns have not the slightest connection with the Vengaran revolution," Gorgo answered unhesitatingly.

Had he had any reason to suppose that the other was interested in the success of the Vengaran revolution, Dave Darrin, as a naval officer of the United States, and possessing the strong sense of honor that he did, would have walked away. But Gorgo was a man of honor, and Darrin was satisfied that the truth had been spoken.

"Now, Señor," Dave resumed, "we have a matter of the utmost importance that we wish to discuss with you."

"Honor me, and favor me, by proceeding," requested Gorgo, in his most courteous tone.

"Señor, you remember the evening that we met you in Colon?"

"I shall never be able to efface that happiness from my memory," replied Gorgo elaborately.

"Thank you. Now, Señor, while we were waiting at the mole for our launch, a negro mes-

Senor Gorgo.

senger ran up to me, and handed me a package which he said was from you, and —"

"Ah!" broke in Señor Gorgo sharply, his voice a-quiver with interest.

"On board ship," Darrin went on, "we opened that package and found it to contain a wonderful cross —"

Again Pasquale Gorgo interrupted with a gasp that had in it a little cry of amazement.

"Wait!" he commanded. "Allow me, before you proceed further, to describe that cross."

Which Pasquale Gorgo then and there did, describing the diamond and ruby cross as accurately as though he held it in his hand at the moment of speaking.

"I see that you know the cross," Dave observed. "So undoubtedly the negro was right when he said that he brought it from you. Now, Señor Gorgo, I have another question to put to you."

"Go on, I beg of you," urged Gorgo, and to the listeners there seemed to be almost trembling eagerness in his voice.

"Will you tell me why you sent such a gift or keepsake to a poor naval officer?"

"I — I did not send you the cross," replied Gorgo.

"You did not? But the negro said —"

"I am not at fault for what the negro may have

said," replied the other, with something of offense in his tone. "But I know whence the cross came, and I know where it should have gone."

"I had hoped that you were the owner," Darrin went on calmly. "If you are not, then of course we cannot return it to you. Had time permitted, I should have sent it ashore at Colon, in care of your bank, and directed to you."

"I may very properly receive it, and will see that it reaches the rightful owner," guaranteed Gorgo, still with that strange eagerness in his tone.

"But, if it doesn't belong to you, how can we turn it over to you?" broke in Danny Grin.

"*Caballeros,*" begged Gorgo, almost pleadingly, "don't you still believe that I am a man of honor?"

"We feel quite sure of that," Dave Darrin answered gently.

"Then will you not accept my pledge to receive the cross and to make absolutely sure that it reaches its owner?" asked Pasquale Gorgo.

"Yes," assented Dave, after brief thought, "I think we can safely do that."

"A thousand thanks, *caballeros,* for the graciousness that both of you are showing me," cried the voice from the jungle clump.

"Will you come aboard and receive it?" asked Dave.

"Will your ship be here until to-morrow? Will it remain long on this part of the coast?" asked the Señor.

"I do not know what the plans are for keeping the 'Panama' here," Darrin replied. "Dalzell and I are among the youngest officers, and must be contented with guessing instead of knowing."

"My question was indiscreet, I know," answered Pasquale Gorgo quickly. "But I am doing some rapid thinking. It would be much better for me to engage a boatman and go out alongside your ship, but —"

He was silent so long that Dave broke in upon the other's reverie by an impatient gesture.

"*Caballeros,*" sighed Pasquale Gorgo, "I am here on very delicate business. It is a matter of an inheritance. If my presence be known here at this moment, when Vengara is about to divide into two hostile camps, I may lose that inheritance, and, with it, what is after all but a matter of passing moment — my life. Therefore, I am wondering if it will be safe for me to go out to your ship, and thus risk being recognized from the shore by those whom I would not wish to see me. Have I made my predicament plain?"

"Quite," Dave agreed, at once. "But how, then, shall we manage to turn the jeweled cross over to you?"

"Would you turn it over to any messenger that

came from me?" asked the other eagerly. "Wait. If one of you will step in here behind the leaves, and light and screen a match, I will write my name on a card. The messenger who comes from me will bear a similar card from me, and you will know that he comes from me. Will that be satisfactory?"

"Quite," Dave assented, after a moment's consideration.

It having grown quite dark by this time, Dan stepped inside the bush, lighted a match and screened the flame with his hat.

Drawing out a card and a fountain pen, Señor Gorgo wrote his autograph with a flourish.

"Let the card dry a moment, then drop it in your pocket," requested the Señor. "Do not allow yourself to lose it, will you, my friend?"

"I shall take great care to preserve it," replied Dave Darrin, bowing as he accepted the autographed card.

"Hark!" cried Gorgo, a little shiver in his tone. "What is that noise?"

Dave listened for an instant, then smiled. To one with his training the sound was at once understandable. It was the rhythmic whump-whump of bare feet marching in military step.

"At least a part of the government troops are being marched away," Darrin replied.

"I should say, from the sound, that perhaps

the entire division is on the move," Dan added.

"Not the entire command," Dave went on, after peering intently with his sharp eyes into the darkness beyond. "I can see soldiers lounging, or walking idly about, who are not in formation. But I imagine that the larger part of the troops is being moved."

Pasquale Gorgo heaved a quick little sigh.

"Señor," Dave asked, "will it be agreeable to you if we shake hands once more with one who has been a good friend of ours, and if we then take our leave? We must return to our duty."

"Good-bye, then," cried Pasquale Gorgo, holds ing out his hand. "I hope, and something tell-me it is so, that we shall meet many more times, and under the happiest circumstances."

"May fate so provide it," returned Darrin, as they shook hands.

Then, hastily the two chums walked back to the fence where Captain Potter had left them.

Even before they reached the spot they beheld a lighted lantern moving up and down from the shore, signaling a message to the "Panama."

"Some kind of orders," whispered Darrin. "Men are to be sent ashore."

Though upon his return he had missed both of his younger officers, Captain Potter now received their salutes pleasantly enough.

"I fear, sir," apologized Dave, "that we have justly incurred your displeasure by not remaining close at hand."

"Not at all, gentlemen," replied the Panama's Captain. "I did not order you to remain at anchor. You have been walking about, I take it."

The two young ensigns saluted and fell back while their commanding officer read the brief flashes of a signal from the "Panama."

"Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell," resumed Captain Potter, turning to them, "General Belasco is withdrawing with his men to watch other points. Through the night, at least, I have agreed to station a landing party, ostensibly for drill, but in reality that we may keep guard at this point. José Benedito is believed to be not far away, and it is expected that he may attempt a landing in the vicinity of La Choya, for the purpose of going into the interior and joining the rebel army that has mustered in his behalf. Sixty seamen and forty marines will soon be ashore. Lieutenant Thompson will command the detachment, and you will remain with him as junior officers. Lieutenant Thompson, after receiving my instructions, will give you your orders."

Saluting, the two young ensigns once more fell back.

Ere many minutes had passed two launches

put off from the "Panama," soon landing the men of the detachment, together with two rapid-fire guns. On a later trip of one of the launches, sufficient food supplies were sent ashore to make it apparent that the detachment was not expected to return to the ship at daylight.

By and by Captain Potter and his aide returned to the battleship. While they were on their way Lieutenant Thompson called to Dave and Dan, and to Lieutenant Ellis commanding the marine detachment, and walked aside with them.

"Gentlemen," said the detachment commander, "our duties are very specific. It is feared that Benedito may try to land near here. We are to hold up every one who passes, and especially any one who appears to have landed from off-shore, and to make sure if any one so detained is José Benedito. We shall extend our line a good deal, and the 'Panama' will assist us by keeping its searchlights shifting over water and land through the night."

"And no one is to get by?" asked Lieutenant Ellis.

"Not even in the government uniform of Vengara?" inquired Dalzell.

"Not unless he should be personally known to you to represent President Rova's government," replied the detachment commander. "Take no chances. Is that order plain?"

"Yes, sir," answered Dave, saluting.

"No matter what comes up, or who comes along," continued Thompson, "it will be easy to call me. I am to be called at any hour, and as often as it may seem to be in the least necessary. For that matter, I shall not turn in until late. Ensign Dalzell, you will take the guard until midnight. Ensign Darrin will take the guard from midnight to four o'clock, and Lieutenant Ellis from four to eight o'clock in the morning. The 'Panama' and the service are not to be disgraced by letting José Benedito get through at any point."

CHAPTER V

THE MAN WHO PASSED THE GUARD

WITH thirty men on guard at a time, and stationed at intervals of a hundred yards, the guard line extended the better part of two miles.

"I haven't an idea that we shall see the foxy old bandit," Dan murmured, as Dave paced at his side. "José Benedito, from all we have heard of him, is much too foxy a pirate to walk right into a trap. To my mind, the very fact that he

is expected to land near La Choya is very good proof that he won't do anything of the sort."

"You think that the rumor of his landing near here has been spread for a deceptive purpose?" Dave inquired.

"Exactly," nodded Dalzell. "Just as the stage magician, when he wants to do something with his right hand, directs the attention of his audience to his left foot."

"Oh, well," returned Dave, "if Benedito doesn't come within sight of this guard line, it can't in any way reflect upon us if he manages to reach his new army by going through at some other point."

"I'd trot a guard party ten miles to catch the rascal," Danny Grin declared.

"I'd run the guard hard for a distance of twenty miles," Dave smiled. "However, wherever Benedito appears, if a guard holds him up, I believe that he will get through just the same."

"How so?" Dalzell demanded.

"Why, I don't believe that a man like Benedito would be fool enough to take a solitary stroll anywhere on this coast. Wherever he lands, I feel certain that he will be met by guides and guards. Moreover, the guard will be strong enough to fight any force that attempts to stop him. Then, when Benedito and a bodyguard run for the forests and the hills beyond, the main

guard of his party will remain behind long enough to cover the escape by fighting."

"What's that?" asked Dan, halting and turning almost nervously as a challenge in Spanish rang out on the night air from a distance.

"Oh, that is one of Belasco's detachments," Dave guessed. "While our force watches the roadstead at La Choya, I am pretty sure that the President's general is keeping an eye over every other avenue leading into the interior."

After strolling about for an hour with his comrade, Dave turned his steps toward the tent that had been erected for the shelter of the four officers of the party. Thompson and Ellis were already sound asleep. Finding his own blankets in the dark, Darrin quietly disposed himself for rest.

He felt as though he had barely dropped asleep when Dan stood over him, shaking him by the shoulders.

"Five minutes to the time when I turn over the guard to you," whispered Dalzell.

Rising, picking up belt, sword and revolver, Darrin stepped into the open air, trying to chase the sleep out of his eyes.

"That was a mean trick, Dan," he whispered, in playful reproach. "I was just dreaming of the good old home town of Gridley when you kicked me."

"Kicked you?" echoed Dan, in amazement. "I did nothing of the sort."

"For all the pleasure your summons gave me, you might as well have kicked me," Dave laughed.

Down the line they could hear the challenges as the new guard replaced the sentries of the old.

"You may as well turn in, Danny boy," Dave advised. "I'm now feeling equal to the task of dismissing the old guard when it marches in."

"Thank you," yawned Dalzell. "I'm sleepy enough."

Into the tent crept Dalzell stealthily, while Darrin, after rubbing his eyes, felt much more awake.

Dave swept water and land alike, as far as he could see, with the night glasses that his comrade had turned over to him, but except for the naval guard there was no one stirring.

The old guard marched back at last, the petty officer in charge reporting, "All's well." Dave dismissed the old guard, then strolled up and down the line, keeping always within hailing distance of the officers' tent and the superior officer whom it sheltered.

"This is about as dull a lot as could come to one in the Navy," Darrin told himself an hour later. "There will be absolutely nothing to do but keep awake. I wish Benedito *would* try to get through here, even with a guard of hundreds

of fighting men. That would inject some life into this hot night."

Dave paced up and down for another hour, hearing nothing but the "all's well" call that went up and down the guard line on the hour.

In still another half hour Darrin found himself wishing that his tour of duty were ended.

"If the fellows will let me alone when I get back to my blankets, I shall sleep over breakfast," the young officer told himself laughingly. "When doing nothing in this hot climate, a fellow doesn't need his full three meals a day."

Presently Darrin stepped over to the guard tent, holding his watch up to the lantern.

"Hardly more than a half an hour of the tour left," he told himself, gaping. "Then —"

Like a flash he darted into the open, putting away his watch as he ran.

"Officer of the guard!" a distant voice bawled. "Post number eleven!"

"And a nearer voice took up the hail: "Officer of the guard! Post number eleven!"

"Oh pshaw!" grinned Dave Darrin, a moment later. "Undoubtedly some gardener, on his way into La Choya with his produce. There will be no such luck for us as catching José Benedito."

Past him had raced the officer of the guard, accompanied by four hastily awakened members of the next guard detail.

"One good thing about it," Dave murmured. "I don't have to run my feet off to get to number eleven. The poor suspect, whoever he is, will be brought here to me."

Presently, through the darkness, Darrin heard a voice mildly protesting in English, but the sound soon died out.

"They've picked up a white man," muttered Darrin. "The sentry ought to know that Benedito will be as brown as any other man of Spanish blood."

Still he waited, having moved to a distance from the officers' tent. Unless the sentry's "catch" amounted to something, Dave did not wish his brother officers awakened.

Stolidly, head up, a short stout man marched in the square formed by the four sailormen of the guard, Gunner's Mate Robinson trailing slightly behind in case the detained one should make an effort to dash away to liberty.

When near Darrin in the darkness the gunner's mate ran ahead, stopping and saluting.

"The sentry on post number eleven, sir," reported the petty officer, "deemed it best to stop the man we're bringing to you. He tried to slip past the line without being seen."

Now the guard party halted, with the detained one close enough to meet Ensign Darrin face to face.

"Señor Gorgo!" uttered Dave, unaccountably astonished.

"It is I, señor," replied Gorgo stiffly, yet struggling to smile. "I endeavored to assure your sentry that he was foolishly in error, but he would insist on my halting. Then he kept me until these men came and took charge of me. How fortunate for me, my friend, that you are in command here!"

"I am officer of the guard on this tour of duty, only," Dave explained, as he accepted the señor's hand and shook it.

"I did not think it wise to turn this gentleman free until you had seen him, sir," said Gunner's Mate Robinson, saluting.

"You did quite right," Dave approved.

"But now, of course, you will order your men to turn me free, and with instructions not to molest me again," suggested Pasquale Gorgo.

"Why, I do not see any sense in holding you, Señor Gorgo," Dave admitted. "Still, I must report the matter to my superior officer for his instructions."

"It is annoying!" cried Gorgo impatiently. "Still, I imagine you are the one best qualified to understand whether I must be further detained. At your convenience, my dear friend!"

From behind the flap of the officer's tent a head was thrust out.

"Has the guard stopped some one, Mr. Darrin?" asked Lieutenant Thompson.

"Yes, sir," reported Dave, wheeling and saluting. "The man is here."

"Who is he?"

"Señor Pasquale Gorgo, whom I met at Colon."

"Then you know him to be Señor Gorgo?"

"Yes, sir," Darrin answered unhesitatingly.

"Then, Mr. Darrin, you may let the gentleman go at his convenience," Lieutenant Thompson instructed his subordinate.

"Very good, sir," Dave replied. "Do you wish to look at Señor Gorgo?"

"Since you know the gentleman personally it is not necessary to have him further looked over or investigated," replied the naval lieutenant.

Saluting his superior, who withdrew into the tent, Dave next turned to the detained one.

"Señor Gorgo," he murmured, "I feel certain that you will not be offended over our instructions that made it necessary for us to detain you briefly. You may now go wherever you will, and the guard will not again bother you. You have my apologies."

"Which are accepted, surely," replied the delighted señor.

"Are you in a hurry?" Dave asked.

"My time is rather valuable, yes," bowed Gorgo.

"Then, whatever your errand," smiled Dave cordially, "I will wish you good fortune."

The two shook hands. Then Pasquale Gorgo, waving his hand as he went, turned and walked past the guard line, heading for the interior. He was quickly out of sight in the darkness of the night. For an instant a beam from a searchlight on the "Panama" rested across him.

"It must be strange business that takes him abroad two or three hours before daylight," mused Dave. "I wonder what his business can be like. By the way — oh, great Scott!"

Like a flash Dave turned and bolted to the officers' tent. Bending over Thompson, Dave shook him until that superior awoke and sat up.

"I am sorry to have to report myself for such stupidity, sir," Dave Darrin explained uneasily, "but I am afraid I have made a sad blunder. I told you that I knew the man to be Señor Gorgo."

"Well, didn't you?" demanded Thompson, calmly.

"In a way, yes, sir. The man introduced himself to Dalzell and myself, in Colon, as being Señor Pasquale Gorgo. The next day the paying teller in one of the banks of Colon addressed him as Señor Gorgo. But that was my only reason for feeling sure that I knew the man's name."

Dave Darrin now looked white and worried, but the darkness in the tent concealed his pallor.

CHAPTER VI

DAVE FEELS THE STING OF DISGRACE

"I DON'T believe I'd worry about it, Darrin," replied the lieutenant. "There can be little doubt that the man's name really is Gorgo."

"If you think there is the slightest doubt of it, sir," Dave hastened to say, "I can take a squad of men and go after him. I do not believe he is yet too far away to be recaptured."

"Not worth the trouble, nor worth the annoyance to Señor Gorgo," replied Lieutenant Thompson slowly. "Bank identifications are as good as any in the world. Banks always take pains to know all that is needful about any customer."

"Then I am not to attempt to molest Señor Gorgo, sir?" Dave persisted, respectfully.

"No," decided Lieutenant Thompson.

Saluting, Darrin left the tent. A few minutes later he re-entered it to arouse Lieutenant Ellis, of the Marine Corps, who was to succeed him on guard duty.

Presently the young marine officer came out, fully dressed and with his side arms on.

"What was that row about Señor Gorgo?"

inquired Ellis. "I heard some of the talk, but was too sleepy to pay heed to it."

Ensign Darrin quickly recounted what had taken place, including his own seeming blunder.

"I fancy Thompson was right," nodded the marine officer. "But —"

Cr-r-rack! rang out a distant volley of rifle fire. There came an answering fire, and then the firing became heavier.

Not even stopping for his side arms, Lieutenant Thompson bolted from the officers' tent.

"What's up?" he demanded.

"We have just been asking ourselves the same question, sir," Dave replied.

Still the crackling firing sounded, becoming still heavier.

"It isn't a general engagement, but there must be a pretty lively skirmish going on over there," cried Ellis.

"It may be one party of government troops firing into another party by mistake," ventured Lieutenant Thompson.

"I wish I had kept my wits about me," uttered Darrin, wretchedly. "By my too-ready identification I'm afraid I've let a suspicious person get through our line."

"Oh, I hardly believe that," murmured Lieutenant Thompson soothingly.

His martial blood responding to the sound of

firing, Danny Grin now awakened. In another instant he stepped from the tent.

"There's the 'Panama' signaling," cried Lieutenant Thompson, catching sight of the twinkling then vanishing lights at the military mast of the "Panama." "Mr. Dalzell, take the message, sir."

"Very good, sir," Dalzell answered, saluting. In the dark, relying mainly upon the sense of feeling, Dan jotted down the letters as they twinkled out on the battleship.

"Captain Potter asks if we know the cause of the firing, sir," Dan reported.

"Call a signalman, and have him signal back, by lantern, that we don't know, but think there is a clash between government and rebel forces," directed Lieutenant Thompson.

Then Dan's brother officers devoted all their attention to the distant sounds of firing, now growing more indistinct.

"Captain asks if we let any one through this line, sir," Dan reported.

"Inform Captain Potter that we let through only one man, a Señor Gorgo."

"Captain asks who let Señor Gorgo go through," was Dan's next report.

"Signal that Ensign Darrin let him through, acting upon my orders," answered Lieutenant Thompson.

"Please don't take the blame upon yourself

like that, sir," Dave urged. "Please add that you ordered Gorgo's release on my report that I knew the man to be Pasquale Gorgo, and also that I made my report merely upon a bank identification."

"Mr. Dalzell," broke in Lieutenant Thompson, "let my message go exactly as I gave it to you."

"Yes, sir."

Back came Captain Potter's inquiry: "Could either you or Mr. Darrin identify Gorgo sufficiently as having a right to call himself Gorgo?"

This was a direct question. Lieutenant Thompson was obliged to send an exact reply:

"Ensign Darrin reports that the man was identified as one Pasquale Gorgo in a bank at Colon."

"Does Ensign Darrin still believe that the man allowed to pass our lines was really Gorgo?" asked the Captain's signalman from the deck of the dreadnaught.

"Ensign Darrin feels that there is room for doubt," replied the signalman on shore.

"I shall be ashore within ten minutes," came swiftly back.

"Now, if there has been any mistake, I shall have to face the music," murmured Lieutenant Thompson.

"Pardon me, sir," interjected Dave. "Isn't it the fact that I shall be the one to face it?"

"You acted under my orders, Darrin," rejoined the lieutenant, almost stiffly.

"But I was undoubtedly too careless, sir, in reporting to you that I could identify Señor Gorgo," Darrin insisted. "A man may mean well, but that can be no excuse for a military blunder such as I now admit I may have made."

By the time that the launch had put away from the side of the "Panama" the sounds of distant firing could no longer be distinguished.

The instant that the launch grounded, several men sprang ashore, bearing a long roll of canvas between them. Another man followed with a table desk on his head, while still another carried several folding camp chairs and a folding canvas cot.

Behind them all came Captain Potter, that officer looking not a little worried.

"Horsemen approaching on the land side, sir," reported the nearest sentry.

"Stand by to call out the guard," Thompson ordered a sailorman bugler. Then he added, to his brother officers:

"I don't believe that a cavalry party is trying to rush us, but it is as well to be prepared for anything."

A moment later the young officers wheeled to salute and receive the commanding officer.

"Pitch the tent here," directed the Captain,

as he returned the salutes of his subordinates. Half a dozen men quickly raised the tent, driving stakes and making the guy-ropes fast.

"Go forward, Lieutenant Ellis, and see whom the sentries have stopped," ordered Lieutenant Thompson, as a challenge rang out.

"Now, tell me what has happened," ordered Captain Potter gravely, leading Thompson into the tent, where the desk had been placed and chairs set up.

Before Thompson had been able to proceed with more than twenty words Lieutenant Ellis appeared, saluting, and followed by half a dozen officers in the Vengaran uniform.

"Invite the gentlemen inside," directed the Captain.

Lieutenant Ellis, who understood Spanish well, quickly introduced the Vengarans.

"I have the good fortune to be able to speak English," gravely declared Colonel Ramón, ranking officer of the visitors.

"Colonel," began Captain Potter, "doubtless you can tell me what was the cause of the firing yonder."

"It was a brush with a rebel party," replied Ramón.

"Of course, sir, you have taken pains to be sure of that," hinted Captain Potter.

"We have looked at some of the enemy's dead,"

was the rather stiff reply, "and they wore what I have been informed is the new rebel uniform."

"It was not supposed, Colonel Ramón, as I understand it, that there was a rebel force so near to La Choya."

"This rebel force must have come down here to receive some person important to the rebels, and to escort him safely into the interior," answered Colonel Ramón, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Did the rebels get away from your forces, sir?" asked Captain Potter.

"Some of them did," said Ramón grimly. "Of course the real rebel body got away from us, leaving only a rear guard to fight after we discovered the movement of their troops."

"Why should the rebels venture so near the coast?" asked Captain Potter.

"They could have had but one object," frowned Colonel Ramón.

"And that would be?"

"To meet José Benedito, and to escort him back to the rabble that has organized in the hills to fight for him and his villainy."

"Have you any idea that the rebels met Benedito?" pressed Captain Potter.

"How can I possibly know about that?" asked the Vengaran officer, shrugging his shoulders. Then he added, quickly:

"I have come here for the very purpose of asking if your guard has seen any man who might be supposed to be Benedito, and whether you have allowed any one to pass through your lines."

"There was one man who got through," replied Captain Potter. "A man who gave the name of Pasquale Gorgo. Was that not the name, Mr. Darrin?"

"It was, sir," Dave assented gravely.

"Gorgo?" repeated Colonel Ramón. "Gorgo? What does a mere name signify? Cannot any one change his name in order to effect a desired purpose?"

"Have you a picture of Benedito?" asked Captain Potter suddenly.

"Have you, Captain?" asked Colonel Ramón, turning to one of his own Vengaran officers.

The young man so addressed bowed in the affirmative. Slinging around in front of him a case that he had worn suspended by a strap over one shoulder, the young captain opened the case, drawing forth a small photograph.

This Colonel Ramón received, glancing at it and passing it to Captain Potter, who, in turn, after a brief look, handed it to Dave Darrin.

"Did the man you passed through the lines look like this man, Ensign?" inquired Captain Potter.

Dave took the photograph, scanning it intently under the lantern that lighted the tent.

Then he heaved a sigh of great relief.

"No, sir," he answered, "this is not a photograph of the man whom I know as Pasquale Gorgo."

"Good!" ejaculated Captain Potter, in a tone of downright satisfaction.

Then, as Dave continued to gaze at the picture a puzzled expression crept into his eyes.

"Though this is not the picture of Gorgo," he declared, a moment later, "it is the photograph of some one whom I have seen — somewhere! Is it not, Mr. Dalzell?"

"Yes," agreed Dan, after having inspected the photograph closely.

"Where have you seen the man who looks so much like Benedito?" asked Colonel Ramón sharply.

"I am trying to think," murmured Dave, reflecting deeply.

Of a sudden he glanced up with a start, then turned to the Vengaran captain who had produced the photograph.

"Did I not see, in your case, some drawing and coloring implements?" Dave asked, in Spanish.

"Yes," replied the other. "I am an engineer officer, and sometimes I draw maps."

"Have you sepia and China white?" Darrin went on.

"Yes, indeed, and brushes and pencils," answered the young captain.

"May I borrow some of your colors?" Dave asked. "And, Captain Potter, may I take the liberty, sir, of doing some work on this photograph at your table?"

"Certainly," nodded the "Panama's" commander, and the Vengaran engineer officer opened his case, laying it on the table before Ensign Darrin.

The picture that lay before him showed José Benedito with a heavy moustache and an imperial, ofttimes called a "goatee."

Preparing the China white and the sepia, Dave did some quick, sketchy work that blocked out the moustache and imperial on the face of Benedito, staring up at him from the card.

As his work finished completion, Dave again started. With the last touch of the brush, Dave Darrin felt the cold sweat standing out on his forehead. He began to shake as though the chill of the tropic hour before dawn were biting into his marrow.

"You appear much disturbed," observed Colonel Ramón, eyeing the young ensign keenly.

"Yes," muttered Dave, through parched lips.

"Why?" almost hissed the Vengaran colonel.

Pasquale Gorgo had been a smooth-faced man. Dave Darrin, by blocking out moustache and imperial, had thereby constructed a face that startled him.

"Dan!" gasped Dave.

"Here," replied his chum, taking two strides forward.

"Look at this portrait of Benedito, with moustache and imperial 'killed.' Whose photograph would you call it now?"

Danny Grin accepted the proffered photograph, staring at it intently. He, too, started.

"Gorgo!" he gasped.

"In other words," Dave continued, in a cold, hard voice, "in identifying Pasquale Gorgo and letting him through our lines I have almost certainly allowed the notorious dictator, José Benedito, to get through to his armed friends. And I was stationed here to keep Benedito out of the country!"

"What? You have let the infamous Benedito through, to overturn Vengara and soak South America in the blood of battle?" raged Colonel Ramón.

Dave's face was ghastly white, at this moment, but he did not forget his dignity.

"Sir," he said, choking slightly, as he wheeled, faced Captain Potter, saluted, and let his hands fall to his sword, "I did nothing with wrong in-

tention, but I have blundered in a way that cannot be overlooked. I offer you, sir, the only apology that is possible to an officer in my position. I tender you herewith my sword, and with it goes my resignation from the Navy of the United States!"

CHAPTER VII

THE QUESTION, "WHOSE FAULT?"

"SO you expect to escape your disgrace so easily as this, young man?" demanded Colonel Ramón, in a towering rage. "If you were an officer of mine, and made such a blunder, I'd have you shot!"

"Colonel," interrupted Captain Potter, rising in quiet dignity and facing the Vengaran officer, "you may preserve discipline in your own command in any way that you see fit. You will not be permitted to criticize officers under my command."

"I'd have him shot!" insisted Colonel Ramón.

"In matters involving officers and men under your command, sir," Captain Potter continued coldly, "you have the privilege of proceeding under the laws of your country, whatever they

may be, and in accordance with your own traditions of honor and justice. I have the same privilege and want no suggestions from you. It may be that Ensign Darrin has erred. That, at the present moment, I cannot say; but I shall not censure him until I am satisfied that he has acted in a manner unbecoming his position as an officer in the United States Navy."

Darrin, as his commander had turned away from him, laid his sword upon the table.

"What's this for, Mr. Darrin?" the commander of the "Panama" inquired.

"I — I have surrendered my sword to you, sir," the young ensign replied.

"I decline to accept it, and direct you to resume your sword, sir."

Danny Grin, who had been tugging at the trappings to detach his own sword, now desisted.

"What were you about to do, Mr. Dalzell?" demanded Captain Potter.

"I was about to turn over my sword, too, sir!"

"Why?" — sharply.

"Because it struck me, sir, that, if a naval officer could lose his commission for such a mistake as Ensign Darrin's, I might as well leave the service while I am young enough to go back to my parents, get a little more schooling and make a fresh start in life."

This response was so gravely and respectfully delivered that Captain Potter found difficulty in preserving his gravity.

"You had better keep your sword, too, Mr. Dalzell," replied Captain Potter, gently.

"All this talk," broke in Colonel Ramôn, "does not change the fact that Benedito has passed through and joined his lawless mob. What are we going to do about it?"

"I regret that the United States Navy should contribute ever so little to the success of Benedito," replied the naval captain, courteously. "You belong to the army of Vengara, Colonel, and I would suggest that the matter of Benedito has now become one with which the Vengaran army must deal."

"Are we to have no satisfaction?" glowered Colonel Ramón. "Is this stupid young officer of yours to go unpunished?"

"Colonel Ramôn!" exclaimed the American commander sharply, "You forget yourself, sir! With the discipline of the United States Navy you have no more to do than I have with the discipline of the army of Vengara."

"Then you refuse satisfaction?"

"Colonel, you have no right to demand satisfaction and I have no right to promise it. I shall question Ensign Darrin further, and shall report his full explanation to my superiors. Unless there

appears to be good reason I shall not recommend to my superiors that Ensign Darrin be punished. I, too, saw the photograph of José Benedito, and I saw it again after it had been altered enough to make it look like Pasquale Gorgo. I think I should have been deceived myself, sir, so much did the smooth face of Benedito change his former appearance. Colonel, have you any further communications for me?"

"No, but I expect that my government soon will have," replied the colonel, with a frown and a shrug of impatience.

"I shall expect to spend part of my time ashore until I hear from my superiors," continued Captain Potter, holding out his hand. "I shall hope to have the pleasure of meeting you often, Colonel, officially."

The two representatives of the several countries shook hands. Very likely Colonel Ramón noticed the emphasis put on the word "officially."

Captain Potter, dismissing his younger officers, sat at his desk to ponder and plan. He knew that, within a very short time, he must communicate by wireless with the admiral of the South American Fleet, wherever that officer might be located.

The United States government would be deeply chagrined at the failure of its plans. While that chagrin lasted it was extremely likely that Ensign David Darrin would come in for a very

liberal share of censure, coupled, possibly, with punishment.

"May I come in, sir?"

It was Lieutenant Thompson who stood at the doorway of the tent.

"Come in, Mr. Thompson."

"Sir," said the lieutenant, "I should like to speak with you about Mr. Darrin's part, and my own, in letting Benedito through our lines, if it were really he who got through to-night."

"Go on, Mr. Thompson."

"Darrin told me that he knew the man to be Pasquale Gorgo, and I instructed him to let the fellow through our lines, as we were here to keep guard against one José Benedito. Almost immediately afterward Mr. Darrin came to me and told me that he felt that perhaps he had been too hasty in saying that he knew the man to be Gorgo; that he had only the bank identification by which to go. Mr. Darrin asked me if he should take a squad of men with him and go in search of 'Gorgo,' seizing him, if found, and bringing him back here. I told Mr. Darrin that banks are always particular about identifications, and that if a leading American bank in Colon had identified 'Gorgo' then I was wholly satisfied. So, Captain Potter, if there be blame to be placed anywhere I feel that it should fall upon my head."

In an instant the "Panama's" commander was

on his feet, gripping the lieutenant's nearer shoulder.

"Thank you, Thompson," he said, quietly but earnestly. "I feel that both yourself and Darrin are too valuable officers to be spared from the service, or even to be censured. That both of you acted faithfully and according to your best judgment I am satisfied. It would cause me extreme distress to see either of you get into any trouble through a mistake of which any of us might be guilty. Of course I shall be bound to report the matter to the Admiral, and his decision, or that of the Navy Department, will be the binding decision; but I assure you that I shall do my best to protect both of you. And now please send for Mr. Darrin."

Dave came, Thompson being ordered to remain. Captain Potter repeated what had just been said, then dismissed them.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Dave, when he and Thompson were both out of the commanding officer's hearing, "that you should drag yourself into my scrape. I don't want to see you in trouble through my blunder. It was good of you, and I am inclined to think that you were too good."

"Did I tell Captain Potter anything more than the truth?" demanded the lieutenant.

"No, but —"

"Then let the matter rest where it stands," smiled Thompson. "When, undoubtedly, I am at fault I am not going to hide my own mistakes behind a junior officer. Darrin, you and I were both concerned in making what may turn out to have been a terrible mistake. If so, we will each take his own share of the responsibility. No gentleman can do less."

Dan Dalzell had lost his famous grin. He went about infinitely more gloomy than Dave himself.

After the first streaks of light had appeared in the east, daylight came on quickly.

Before seven o'clock General Belasco, attended by his staff and a bodyguard, rode up. He came to report that the government believed that Benedito was now well on his way to join his rebel sympathizers.

President Rova's government had despatched several flying columns to intercept the ex-dictator, but it was feared that Benedito would be able to outwit the military commanders, and that the revolution would now have to be fought to a bloody conclusion.

General Belasco was wholly courteous, in which attitude he differed much from his subordinate, Colonel Ramón, but even he made it plain that President Rova hoped that Captain Potter and his superiors would make a strict investigation, to the end that any subordinate officers who had

been guilty of carelessness might be properly punished.

"But I do not believe that any of my officers were guilty of any intentional error," Captain Potter replied stoutly. "I can only assure you that the American government will do strict justice in the matter. Punishment I cannot promise."

"In that case President Rova will take it up directly with your government," responded General Belasco. "Of course his excellency feels that great harm has been done, through the carelessness of your officers, to Vengara, to South America and to the moneyed interests of your country and of Europe."

Then it was decided that the naval landing party should return aboard ship. Within an hour the last sailor and marine had left the beach.

Back among his fellow officers, Dave was touched by the fact that all treated him with the greatest consideration.

Captain Potter prepared a lengthy wireless dispatch, which was sent on its way to Admiral Folks, then at Rio de Janeiro.

"Dispatch received," wired the Admiral. "Have referred it to the Navy Department. Take no action until you receive orders."

In his cabin, off duty, Ensign Dave Darrin, feeling utterly wretched, sat staring at that very

certain "hoodoo," the diamond and ruby cross.

"And it was all my fault, after all," groaned Dan Dalzell.

"How so?" demanded Dave, glancing up.

"Why," wailed Dan, "with my usual stupidity I had to go and get myself into trouble by getting into that street fight and by letting that fellow 'Gorgo' get me out of it. That began the acquaintance that has ripened into what I fear is going to prove the biggest sort of trouble for you."

CHAPTER VIII

DAN HAS HOPES FOR THE ADMIRAL

THREE days had passed and there was no longer any doubt that José Benedito had really slipped through the American naval lines.

He was with his troops and more volunteers had hastily joined his standard. He now commanded forty thousand armed men, and the government troops already had suffered two severe defeats.

Further, the ex-dictator was advancing his forces, and was now within less than forty miles

of the coast. It was even rumored that he planned to seize the port of La Choya and advance upon the capital. There were predictions that, within two months, Benedito would once more be the supreme dictator of Vengara.

Almost hourly reports came in of the rebel chieftain's dark deeds. Several planters, who were known to favor President Rova, and who lived in the country now traversed by the rebels, had been seized and shot for "treason" to the revolutionary leader.

President Rova's supporters, too, had been active in ferreting out many Benedito sympathizers in the capital. Some of these had been put to death at ònce, and many more now languished in prison.

"The reign of blood has set in," declared Lieutenant Thompson.

"And prices of many South American securities will go tumbling in Wall Street," added Lieutenant Ellis. "On account of the European war having made it necessary to sell all foreign securities held in Europe, I do not suppose the London Stock Exchange or the Paris Bourse will have any such slump as would happen if Europe were at peace."

"Who would ever think that the mistake of a young officer could bring all this trouble?" asked Dave, his face twitching.

"My boy," broke in a lieutenant commander, kindly, "when you have been several years more in the service you will know so much about the trials of an American naval officer that you will wonder why any of them consent to remain in the service."

President Rova had cabled to Washington his complaint about the conduct of the two officers who had unwittingly allowed the ex-dictator to get through the lines and reach his followers.

Admiral Folks, now proceeding up the coast, had had many wireless conferences with the Navy Department.

Nothing whatever of Darrin's part in the drama had filtered through to the newspapers. The Washington government was not prepared to admit that it had stood as ally to either faction in Vengara, although the sympathies and interests of the United States in the matter were very well understood.

But at last a decisive reply came. Admiral Folks, with a good deal of personal satisfaction, was able to send word to Captain Potter that the Navy Department, while "regretting" the unfortunate passage of Benedito through American lines, directed that no criticism be made of any officer who had had a share in unknowingly permitting the ex-dictator to reach his armed forces.

Captain Potter at once sent for Lieutenant

Thompson and Ensign Darrin, and read to them his instructions.

"Which means," continued the Captain, "that your government does not hold either of you blamable in the matter, which, I am glad to add, is also my own opinion. Gentlemen, I congratulate you. The incident is closed."

"Thank you, sir," Dave replied earnestly. "I cannot forget, however, that my stupidity —"

"Say, rather, your unavoidable mistake," put in the Captain, kindly.

"I cannot forget that it was I who aided that scoundrel, Benedito, to reach his followers and start in on a career of revenge and murder," Dave went on. "Captain, I feel that it is up to me, sir, to repair my terrible mistake."

"What?" asked Captain Potter in astonishment. Then his face relaxed into a smile, as he asked:

"Mr. Darrin, am I to understand that you wish to take fifty men and an automatic gun ashore, and do your best to put down the rebellion?"

"Hardly that, sir," Darrin answered, with a smile. "But there is something that I can do — a chance that I can take."

"What is it, Mr. Darrin?"

"Will you permit me, sir, to go to my quarters, and to return in about a minute?"

"Certainly."

Hastily saluting, Darrin went rapidly to his own quarters, returning with the plush box, which he opened and laid before his superior, explaining how the cross had come into his possession.

"Benedito denied to me that this was his," said Dave, "but I am certain that he sent it to me."

"Benedito would not hesitate an instant about lying," Captain Potter replied thoughtfully.

"I feel pretty certain, sir, that he lied," Dave returned gravely. "At any rate, he seemed anxious to have me restore this cross to him. Now, sir, what would prevent me from going through to his camp and returning this cross to him?"

"Nothing, but lack of permission, and the great probability of your death if you should undertake the feat," replied Captain Potter, promptly.

"I think it could be done, sir, and I think it could be got away with, sir," Darrin urged. "Captain Potter, if I can reach Benedito, with this jeweled cross as an excuse, I believe that I can arrest him and bring him through his own lines to the coast."

"Are you mad, Mr. Darrin?" demanded the battleship's commander, staring hard at his young officer.

"I think not, sir," Dave answered smilingly. "I believe that the feat can be accomplished, sir."

"But Benedito's men would tear you to pieces if they saw you threaten their leader."

"Perhaps, if they knew that I had threatened him, sir. But I should try to conceal that fact, and so work upon Benedito's fears that he would, in the dread of instant death, help me to keep up the pretense that he was strolling through his lines with me. If I once got him outside of those lines, I could hurry him along until I landed him a prisoner at the coast."

"My boy," asked the Captain kindly, "have you any idea of the ferocious courage of José Benedito?"

"I know his reputation for courage, sir, but I have seen something of the man. Benedito, I believe, is an extreme egotist. He would risk all, and dare all, on the chance of putting his plans through. On the other hand, if he saw his life about to slip away from him, I believe that he would submit, and wait philosophically for a better chance."

"But if your estimate of the fellow failed? If he defied you and called upon his men to seize you?" pressed Captain Potter.

"That is the fighting chance, sir," Dave Darrin responded calmly. "It is the chance that I now beg your permission to take. I couldn't take any men with me, sir," Darrin went on eagerly, beginning to hope that his commanding officer

might agree to his proposal. "Anything that looked like an expedition would defeat my purpose in seeking Benedito."

"To go alone would be worse than madness, Mr. Darrin. Undoubtedly you would be sniped at from ambush long before you discovered Benedito's camp. In fact, I regard it as practically certain that you would be killed."

"That is the daily risk, sir, of an officer on active service. I know the risks, and am quite willing to take them all."

"Two might accomplish more than one, sir," suggested Lieutenant Thompson, somewhat eagerly. "I gladly volunteer to accompany Mr. Darrin."

"You are needed in the gunnery work on board, Mr. Thompson," observed the Captain. "Besides, this scheme, if adopted, would be Mr. Darrin's idea, and you are his superior officer."

"I would gladly waive my rank, sir, while away, and take Mr. Darrin's orders," offered the lieutenant.

"That hardly would be proper," replied Captain Potter. "I will say, further, that I regard the enterprise as too desperate to be undertaken."

"Then, sir," Dave asked disappointedly, "may I ask if you intend to shelve my proposal, or to report unfavorably upon it?"

"I don't know just what to say," Captain Potter replied, and fell to deliberating.

"May I speak from my own viewpoint, sir?" the young ensign pressed.

"Yes."

"You have spoken, sir, of the danger to my life. Is it to be compared with the risk of life to which hundreds or thousands of others may be subjected, if this revolution continues? Already many prisoners have been executed by both sides."

"Those who lost their lives were not Americans," Captain Potter reminded him.

"Yet there are plenty of Americans in the interior of Vengara," Dave urged. "Do we know at what moment many Americans may find themselves oppressed or shot by José Benedito? If I were to undertake this mission, and succeed, is it possible to guess how many American lives I might thereby save?"

"I do not see how success could be possible," rejoined Captain Potter, "but I do see how I might quickly lose a useful young officer."

"I'm ready, sir," Lieutenant Thompson again reminded his commander, "and I'm willing to go as Darrin's subordinate on this mission. I will gladly trust my life in his hands."

"It is out of the question for you to go, Mr. Thompson," replied the Captain. "As I have already said, you are indispensable to the success of our gunnery drills. Mr. Darrin, if you were

to go, do you know any brother officer who would be willing to accompany you?"

"Yes, sir. Since it would be impossible for Mr. Thompson to go with me, I know one brother officer who would gladly go through with me, even into the very jaws of death."

"Who is it?"

"Ensign Dalzell, sir."

"You are sure that he would?"

"I'm positive, sir," Dave went on eagerly, for he thought he saw signs of yielding in his commanding officer's eyes. "Have I your permission, sir, to tell your orderly to have Mr. Dalzell sent for?"

"Yes."

Like a flash Dave Darrin was outside. In less than two minutes Ensign Daniel Dalzell reported, saluting.

"Mr. Darrin," commanded the Captain, "repeat to Mr. Dalzell the nature of the proposal you have just made me."

As Dave hastened with the details of the scheme Danny Grin's eyes lighted up approvingly.

"What do you think of this, Mr. Dalzell?" inquired the Captain.

"Why, sir, it looks to me to be as easy as for G. H. S. to win a game of football back in the good old town of Gridley. We nearly always won, sir."

"Doubtless," smiled Captain Potter. "But this is a different sort of game in which the alternative prizes are success or death, with all the odds in favor of death. Do you not realize, Mr. Dalzell, that such a mission is practically doomed to failure from the outset?"

"I don't believe anything is doomed to failure when Mr. Darrin has it in charge, sir," Danny Grin answered.

Then Dan put in his earnest plea. In the end all that Captain Potter would promise was that he would give it full consideration, and would possibly take it up with the Admiral.

"Then all I can say," murmured Dan, in his chum's ear, as they returned to quarters, "is that I have never met Admiral Folks, but I hope he's a live one!"

CHAPTER IX

PLUNGING INTO THE FOREST OF FATE.

IT was one day later. Two young officers stood in the Captain's office, breathlessly awaiting his announcement.

"Admiral Folks," commented Captain Potter, "possesses one characteristic that some people might define as a fault, and others as a virtue. Whenever possible he makes his communications extremely brief."

"Then, sir, he must have said, 'No,'" suggested Danny Grin. "That is one of the shortest words in the language, so far as I am aware."

"He didn't say quite that," replied Captain Potter. "I will read you just what he did say. Here it is."

Picking up a sheet on which was written a Navy wireless message, he read:

"'Let Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell attempt undertaking if you wish. If they are lost you will not be criticized.'"

Breathing hard, both young officers stood at attention, waiting for Captain Potter to declare his decision in the matter.

The matter had now reached a point where it would not do for them to urge their superior unduly.

For a moment Captain Potter sat erect in his chair, intently studying the face of his desk clock. At last he spoke.

"Do you both still wish to go?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," came with precision from both.

"Mr. Darrin, do you still entertain a hope that you could succeed in such a mission?"

"I do, sir."

"And you, Mr. Dalzell?"

"I believe in the success of anything that Mr. Darrin undertakes."

Again Captain Potter pondere."

"I wish," he remarked, at last, "that I could feel as hopeful as do you two gentlemen."

"May I speak, sir?" asked Danny Grin.

"Yes."

"Then I would suggest, sir, that you already have the Admiral's opinion upon that subject. He believes that 'you will not be criticized.'"

"Then you young gentlemen really wish to go?"

"More, sir, than we could wish anything else," Dave replied, in intense earnestness.

"It is now not quite noon," murmured the commanding officer, glancing at his watch. "Probably, within two hours, I can secure a

pass for you from General Belasco's representative that will take you safely through the lines of President Rova's troops. But what will happen to you when you run into the rebel lines? Benedito has attracted to his colors many men of lawless careers. He probably has many bandits with him. These fiery, unruly fellows are quite capable of shooting you on sight. Recollect that you will have no pass to take you through the rebel lines. How will you be able to save yourselves against arrest by the rebels, or even something worse?"

"As a last resort," Dave proposed, "we have the diamond and ruby cross. Its value is evident. Any rebel officer who held us up ought to be satisfied if we tell him that we are returning that cross to Benedito, and want him to let us go to the chieftain under a guard. Any man of intelligence would know that we would not dare to play a desperate game like that if it were all bluff. And, of course, Benedito *will* receive us with delight when we hand him his bauble."

"But not all of these ex-bandit chiefs *are* men of intelligence," objected Captain Potter. "Many of them are simply plain, brutal, stupid fellows, who can understand nothing except money and murder."

"I believe, sir, that we shall be able to handle each interruption to our journey in a way that

will take us safely through to the end of it," Ensign Darrin ventured.

Captain Potter scrutinized the two eager faces before him.

"I believe you will have to go," he said, at last. "My only scruples are as to your safety."

"Our safety is not the first thing that we seek, sir," Dave responded. "We care for our safety only as it affects the success of our enterprise."

For five full minutes Captain Potter sat reflecting in silence. At last he aroused himself.

"You shall go," he said.

Instantly the two faces before him beamed with happiness.

"You will equip yourselves for the trip," the Captain continued, "in whatever way you think best. I will send ashore at once for the pass."

At the wardroom table, a little later, Darrin and Dalzell said nothing to their brother officers of the business that would soon take them ashore and into the interior of the country.

Immediately after leaving the wardroom Dave and Dan retired to their cabins. There they carefully laid out the outfits on which they already had decided.

Each attired himself in khaki uniform, as best suited to the rough country through which they would have to travel. Each also dropped into a pocket a small automatic revolver. This, with

three extra magazines, gave each ensign forty shots that could be fired rapidly. In addition, each carried two boxes of a hundred cartridges each. Dave took a compass, Dan a pair of field glasses. Finally, each added a three-pint canteen to his equipment, that they might at all times have an abundance of water with them.

Just before two o'clock Captain Potter sent for them.

"Here are your passes," he said, handing a slip of paper to each. "You both read Spanish, so you will be able to understand that General Belasco, through his adjutant-general, Panfilo, orders all of his military commanders to pass you. It is stated that you are on a mission looking to the safety of Americans and Europeans who may be in the district where the two forces are fighting. That is as much of the truth as it is necessary to state."

"How soon may we go ashore, sir?" Dave questioned eagerly.

"As soon as you wish. A launch is now lying alongside."

"Then it seems to me, sir, that in the interests of secrecy, it will be as well if we do not take leave of any of our brother officers."

"Undoubtedly you'd better not," assented Captain Potter. "Now, as I suspect that you are both wishing to end this interview and get

out upon your strange quest, I am not going to detain you here."

Rising, the Captain took the hand of each young officer in turn.

"Good luck and Godspeed," he said simply. "I hope you may return early and safely. Good-bye."

Waiting at the side only until the officer of the deck had been informed that Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell had authority to use the launch, the two former Gridley boys went down over the side.

As the launch sped ashore both ensigns glanced back at that splendid fighting machine, the "Panama." Both raised their felt hats instinctively as their gaze took in Old Glory floating proudly over the stern of the huge battleship.

On shore, near the beach, a party of a dozen Vengaran horsemen awaited them. The young captain of engineers rode forward to meet them, and dismounted.

"I am instructed by General Panfilo, General Belasco's next in command in this district, to ride forward with you at first, and to see you safely on your way," announced the Vengaran captain. "Also, General Panfilo has sent two horses which he begs you will accept and use on your long journey."

"Why, that is splendid of him," cried Dave. "Yet I fear that horses would be more embar-

rassment than help, once we get into the forest. It will be better, Captain, if we ride at first; and then, when you turn back, we shall send the horses back with our sincere thanks to General Panfilo, whose great consideration has won our hearts."

"It shall be as you wish," the engineer captain assured them. "Both General Panfilo and his present very humble representative are wholly devoted to your service, comfort and safety."

This was all in accord with the formally polite speech of the Latin American countries.

As they mounted, the Vengaran captain rode between them, the mounted escort following close behind.

"You will smoke?" inquired the captain, offering his cigarette case. He looked somewhat astonished when informed that neither of his guests had ever used tobacco.

For three miles the ride led across the coast-level plain. Barely had the party entered the forest when it was halted by a challenge.

Past the outpost rode the horsemen. A mile farther they were once more halted, in the deep shade of the virgin forests. Two miles beyond that point Dave and his companions came upon a full regiment of President Rova's loyal troops.

"We will take leave of each other here," said the engineer captain courteously, as he dis-

mounted. "This is as far as my instructions take me. But will you not accept the horses?"

Again Dave and Dan declined, expressing their thanks in their best Spanish. After hearty handshakes with the captain, and with the colonel commanding the loyal regiment at this point, the two young ensigns set off on foot.

"Friend guide told us we'd have no difficulty in following the road forward," muttered Danny Grin. "Where is the road?"

"This barely discernible trail is what the natives call a road," laughed Dave Darrin.

"Then it won't be safe to travel after dark," muttered Dan. "If we do so we shall lose this 'road' forever."

So they plunged on into the forest — bound toward what fate?

CHAPTER X

IN THE RACKET OF BATTLE

JUST as dark came down — Bang!

"What?" gasped Danny Grin, for his chum had thrown himself face down on the ground.

Hardly had the ensigns prostrated themselves when a ragged volley of bullets whined over their heads.

"Which side is firing on us?" Dan demanded.

"Guess!" Darrin answered. "Your conjecture will be as good as mine."

After the volley all was still.

"Going on again?" whispered Dan, in his comrade's ear.

"No," rejoined Dave decisively. "The chaps who fired on us are hiding and waiting for the next sound from us."

For ten minutes the two ensigns lay where they had dropped. Then they heard softly moving feet approaching.

Bit by bit the prowlers came nearer, often stopping to listen.

At last seven men in the uniform of the loyal

troops came into view. Sighting the Americans they halted in amazement.

"Come on," called Dave good-humoredly. "We've been waiting to show you the general's pass, so that you wouldn't fire on us again."

Cautiously, watchfully, the seven stole forward, carrying their rifles ready for instant use, so that treachery would not be possible.

"You are loyal to President Rova?" Dave asked.

"Even so," replied a native, now near enough to be recognized as a sergeant. "You tell me that you have a pass to go through our lines?"

"I have told the truth," Darrin replied, with an engaging smile. "My companion, also, has such a pass. Here are our papers."

While a soldier struck a match the sergeant glanced at the paper. Though it did not dawn on the Americans at that time, the sergeant could not read a line, but he knew the official seal on the slips, which he returned, saying:

"It is well. What would you do here?"

"Don't the passes state that we are concerned in the safety of Americans and Europeans in this district?" countered Darrin.

"It is true," nodded the sergeant, who, truth to tell, had no idea what the official papers stated. He was certain only that they had been issued by the Rova government.

"Are there other troops near here?" asked Dalzell, in Spanish.

"I do not know," replied the sergeant.

"That serves me right," Danny Grin muttered to Dave Darrin. "I had no right to ask about the disposition of the forces to which he belongs."

"Can you tell me, Sergeant, if the road ahead is safe?" Dave inquired.

"There is danger everywhere in these forests," answered the non-commissioned officer. "Who can tell where he will find the *insurrectos* (rebels) at this time?"

"True," nodded Dave. "It seems that my friend and I are full of foolish questions."

"You are officers?" inquired the sergeant.

"Yes; American officers," Dave replied.

"Are you going farther into the forest?"

"We must."

"Then you will do well, gentlemen, to have a care. You may run against *insurrectos* at any point. The passes that take you through President Rova's lines would be your death warrants if you fell into *insurrecto* hands."

"I thank you," Dave nodded, adding, in an undertone:

"Now that it is dark, Sergeant, we had thought of making camp until daylight comes."

For a few moments the sergeant pondered. Then he looked up to say:

"Since you have passes from the true government of Vengara I think perhaps I can send you to a camp where you will be safer than along the road."

"If you will be so good!" cried Ensign Darrin.

"Pablo!"

A ragged young soldier stepped smartly forward.

"Pablo, take the *caballeros* to our commander. Be cautious that you do not run the *caballeros* into the clutches of the *insurrectos*."

"*Si, mi sergente,*" replied the soldier, his words meaning in English, "yes, Sergeant."

"Are you going to follow this chap?" asked Dalzell in English.

"Yes," Dave nodded, replying in the same language. "The chances are better in such company than for us to be alone in the forest."

As soon as Pablo saw that his party was ready he stepped smartly back into the darkness.

"*Mas lentamente,*" Dave called presently. This command to go "more slowly" was necessary, for the Americans could not move so rapidly in the darkness through the tangled growths underfoot.

So Pablo slackened his speed. He was good-humored, and as tractable as a yellow dog.

After going less than a third of a mile the guide was challenged in a low tone.

Instantly the soldier halted, motioning to his

companions to do the same. To the hail Pablo responded that he was bringing into camp two American officers who bore official passes. Then he was ordered to proceed.

A minute later Dave and Dan found themselves among moving forms. A young man who proclaimed himself to be a *teniente*, or lieutenant, stepped forward.

"I understand, *caballeros*, that you have passes. Kindly hand them to me for inspection."

A match being struck the lieutenant scanned the two slips of paper, reading them attentively.

"It is well," he replied. "*Caballeros*, what is your pleasure?"

"If it be permissible, we would like to spend the night with this command," Dave replied.

"Come with me, then, and I will take you to General Enrico."

The walk that followed occupied some minutes. Here and there were small, screened campfires. Dave judged that the command consisted of two regiments of infantry, accompanied by a battery of four rather old-looking field pieces.

There was not a tent in the camp, nor did the soldiers appear to be provided with blankets. The general's headquarters consisted of a small hastily erected thatch house.

"Be good enough to wait outside, while I take your papers in to my commander," urged the

lieutenant, after which he called to some one within, then pushed aside a curtain of bark.

"Where are the American officers?" inquired a voice in the hut. Then a little man of fifty came out. He was poorly dressed, like his men, but he wore shoes, and on his cross belt glittered several metal stars. At his left side hung a handsome sword, plainly revealed in the light that came from inside the tent.

"I am Ensign Darrin, and this is Ensign Dalzell," Dave announced.

"And I am General Felipe Enrico," answered the little man with quiet dignity.

He shook hands cordially with his unexpected visitors, then directed an orderly to bring seats outside. The seats were folding camp stools. Insisting that his guests should first be seated, General Enrico then followed their example.

"I did not expect this pleasure," said the general simply. "Perhaps you are here partly to watch operations in this forest?"

"I cannot say what we shall do," Dave answered. "Our passes state that we are much interested in Americans and Europeans who may be in danger of being caught between the fires of the opposing forces."

General Enrico bowed, offered cigars, and, upon their being declined by his visitors, lighted one himself.

"Have you had any fighting yet, sir?" asked Darrin.

"One engagement," replied General Enrico, smiling grimly. "I regret to say that we were defeated and driven back, but we are hoping for revenge."

"Have you any idea whether the rebels are near?"

"Our scouting parties have met small parties of the *insurrectos* to-day, but there has been no severe fighting."

"Still, sir, rebel scouting parties would indicate, by their presence, that a larger body of rebels must be near."

"That is what we believe," General Enrico admitted. "My command is small, but I have many scouting parties out seeking to get in touch with the forces of that scoundrel, Benedito."

"You do not like Benedito, then?"

"Who could like a traitor to our President?" queried General Enrico. "Besides, the dictator, when in power, imprisoned my father and afterwards ordered his death. Can you not understand, *caballeros*, that I would gladly throw away my life, if by so doing I might keep Benedito from coming back into power?"

There was neither craft nor guile in General Enrico. Quiet and dignified, he was also evidently a man to whom truth was a natural quality.

Dave and Dan soon found themselves taking a decided liking to him.

Presently simple refreshments were brought, flanked by coffee which, as Danny Grin afterwards said privately, was strong enough to "hold a horse at arm's length."

The light meal over, General Enrico, after having two piles of leaves laid in his own quarters and covered with blankets, invited his visitors to come inside and turn in.

"Our host seems too gentle to be a real soldier," whispered Dan, as General Enrico went outside to receive a report that had just been brought in. "One can hardly picture him fighting savagely."

"Make no mistake about that," Dave rejoined. "Men of his gentle stripe are ofttimes the most stubborn and desperate fighters. Backed by the right kind of troops I'll wager that General Enrico would be a hurricane in action. Besides, in fighting Benedito, he has the greatest of motives, a deadly grudge."

Both young officers were asleep when General Enrico returned. Observing them with a smile, the warrior went outside, resuming his seat and smoking one cigar after another while he evidently thought and planned.

Two hours later shots rang out to the westward. In a twinkling Enrico was on his feet, listening intently. Fleet-footed messengers soon arrived.

General Enrico listened with outward calm to the words they bore him, but within two minutes one of his regiments was stealing off into the night.

Three minutes after that, renewed and heavier firing broke out. General Enrico threw away a freshly lighted cigar and strode into the tent. Bending over the sleeping young Americans he shook them gently.

"Come!" he summoned. "If you are interested in seeing how the son of my father fights Benedito and his fellow-traitors, then come!"

Dave Darrin, fully dressed, sprang to his feet. Dan rubbed his eyes, then also sprang up.

As they stepped outside, the remaining regiment was filing off toward the "road," while the battery moved to the left of the infantry.

By now the night's peace was being broken by constant rifle fire in the distance.

"Unless I miss my guess," Dave confided to his chum, as they strode along at the heels of Enrico and the latter's four staff officers, "we are going to find our way into a fight that will be lively enough to satisfy any military enthusiast."

CHAPTER XI

IN AT A GRIZZLY DEATH

BANG! bang! bang! Pop! pop! *Boom!*

As Dave Darrin had predicted it would be, the fight was fast and furious. Parts of two regiments lay across the road, firing all but incessantly towards the Benedito *insurrectos* to the west of them. Between the regiments lay the battery, the red flashes from whose guns helped to make this night of bloodshed all the more hideous.

General Enrico's face was transfigured now. As he listened to the whine of the bullets his head shot forward, his eyes gleamed, his nostrils dilated.

"The enemy are numerous, and they are advancing by rushes," he told Dave. "They would overwhelm us, but perhaps their moment of sorrow is soon to come."

Wounded soldiers were staggering back, some of them to find places in the jungle to lie down and die. Here and there a still, prostrate figure showed where a fighting man had been killed outright.

"The *insurrectos* did not know that we had artillery," Enrico next said gleefully to Dalzell. "Ten more such commands like my little force, and we would surround and exterminate this pest, Benedito."

Not only were the rebels coming nearer; they were also learning more accurately the position of the government line, and now the rebel fire became more deadly.

"You would ease my mind, *caballeros*, if you would condescend to lie down and escape the worst of the fire," coaxed General Enrico.

But Dave, smiling, shook his head.

"Ah, well, at your age, I should have been as fearless," sighed Enrico. "Now, at my age, if I were a non-combatant, I should make myself as safe as possible."

From ahead came a medley of fiendish yells. Plainly the rebels were once more charging. Enrico listened, estimating the distance of the voices, then turned and made a little sign to one of his staff officers, who darted into the bush and was gone.

Down the firing line passed the order to fire faster than ever and to aim low.

"The rebels are not escaping lightly this night," Dave muttered to Dalzell, as their host strode away. "Enrico is a very fury for fighting, and at the same time he's as calm as a statue."

At Dan's side sounded a cry that was barely more than a gasp. A Vengaran officer, pierced through the lungs, stumbled heavily, pitching forward into Dalzell's arms, the front of his military blouse crimsoned by a great blotch of blood.

Dalzell tenderly laid the stricken man on the ground and knelt at his side.

"You can't do anything for the poor fellow, chum," Dave muttered. "He's done for. Only a clergyman could meet his needs now. The time for the surgeon has passed. He won't live a minute."

"*Mil — gracias — Señor,*" gasped the stricken one. They were the last words he uttered. A glaze stole over his open eyes, and Dan, feeling a sense of suffocation, arose. The dying man's offer of a thousand thanks still rang in Dan's ears.

"Will you not protect yourselves, *caballeros?*" urged a staff officer in passing them, but the Americans shook their heads. It would never do, in days to come, to have these South Americans tell it to their friends that they had seen "Yankee" officers afraid in battle.

"There it goes!" shouted Dave Darrin, suddenly, in his chum's ear. "And, by gracious, it's hot! That was Enrico's trap. He has two large flanking parties out on either side, and those

flankers are enfilading the enemy. The flankers' cross-fire must be cutting the rebels nearly to pieces. Dan, do you notice how the *insurrecto* fire has slackened? General Enrico is a military genius!"

Up to the center of the line ran Enrico, his eyes fairly blazing. Instantly he passed orders along his center to fire furiously. A minute later the charging order was roared out, the order racing in repetition from mouth to mouth along the line.

Yelling at their loudest, these loyal troops rose and dashed forward. Only the battery remained, and even that was limbered up and ready to move whenever the lean little ponies might be rushed forward.

Right on the heels of the charging line ran General Enrico and his staff, Dave and Dan dashing along to the right of the staff officers.

Nor was the charge opposed as strongly as Dave had expected it would be. Our two young naval officers were now at the rear of the government troops by at least a hundred yards. Not that it was any safer in the rear, for when modern, high-power guns are used, there is no absolute safety anywhere within a mile of the firing line. Dave and Dan felt only that it was not their fight, and that they must not come too close to the combatants.

After charging some two hundred yards, the

government troops threw themselves on the ground face downward, firing fast. But General Enrico despatched messengers to both wings ordering them to go forward and charge without halting.

"The *insurrectos* are already on the run," he added. "There is not much need of prudence, but considerable need of speed."

So the government line moved forward at least a quarter of a mile through the forest. Now the general ordered a halt, and directed that the battery be brought up and unlimbered.

Away in the distance rebels were still firing, but the fire was not heavy.

Just as the guns were being swung about a deafening chorus of yells rang out.

Crack. Cr-r-r-rack! A galling fire now came from among the limbs of the trees. Three or four of the battery horses fell.

With another yell men dropped down from the trees almost at arm's length from the astounded government troops. The fighting instantly became of the hand-to-hand order.

From the distance the rebels, who had retreated in order to draw the government troops into the trap, now returned to the fighting front.

"That was a splendid piece of strategy," Dave admitted grudgingly. "Now we shall see how much control General Enrico has over his troops."

The little general was everywhere up and down the line, coolly, earnestly exhorting his men to stand firm and to drive the traitors back.

When the returning rebels joined those who had dropped from the trees a determined rush was made. Despite their doggedness and the appeals of their general, the government troops were slowly driven back.

Then came a renewed rush on the part of the rebels, and cold steel clashed furiously.

"Our poor little general!" sighed Dave. "I fear he's up against a heartbreak!"

Within a minute the government line had given way. First a few men turned and dashed frantically back through the night. Then the men began deserting by squads. With a final whoop the rebels drove their foes completely back.

"Come on, Danny boy!" yelled Dave. "The little general is down! To his aid!"

Before they could reach their late host the two young ensigns saw rebels swarm about the vanquished warrior. A screen of bodies shut out Enrico from their view, but the sounds were enough.

"The cowards!" growled Dave. "To attack a wounded man!"

Soon the crowd of rebels around the fallen general dispersed, their faces hideously distorted with passion.

Then it was that Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell saw a sight that made them sick with rage and disgust — a sight they would never forget.

For doughty little General Enrico had been hacked literally to pieces. It was a sight to turn a true soldier sick with pity, but it was the style of fighting that was popular in Vengara.

Up to this time neither Darrin nor Dalzell had been molested. The *insurrecto* furies appeared to recognize them as non-fighting spectators and therefore not worth bothering with.

"We must hustle back into the government lines," urged Ensign Dalzell, as he turned shudderingly away from the remains of the little general.

"We can't make it now," Dave replied in a low voice. "Besides, we are engaged in an effort to reach the rebels. Now, bad a crowd as they are, we must remain here until our mission is accomplished."

"I don't wonder that sane Vengarans hate Benedito," muttered Dan, in a voice that was like the subdued growl of a bear. "I hate him myself. See how brutal his followers are!"

"And so are the government troops, I fancy, when they are not commanded by such a gentleman as we just now saw killed," Darrin rejoined. "I imagine that one side is as bad as the other. It all depends upon who leads or directs the men."

Upon the death of their leader the government troops had taken to their heels, and were now in full flight.

Soon the rebels ceased pursuit. They had won the engagement for Benedito, and they had captured a battery of field artillery.

Having halted, the rebels stopped by companies and battalions on the late battleground.

And now an officer, keen-eyed as an owl in the dark, came striding over to the place where Dave and Dan stood.

"Your names and your business?" he demanded, while a score of rebel infantrymen crowded about.

"We are Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell, of the U. S. S. 'Panama,'" Dave answered for both.

"You have given me your names, if they are the true ones," retorted the officer sharply, "but you have not stated your business."

"We are rather intimate personal acquaintances of General Benedito," Dave returned coolly.

"Your business, I tell you!" insisted the officer, in an ugly tone. "Your business, or I will have you shot first and resume my questioning afterwards. I have neither time nor patience to waste on pigs of Yankees!"

CHAPTER XII

A BEFORE-BREAKFAST STARTLER

DAVE returned the other's look steadily.

"We have personal business with General Benedito," he replied coldly.

"I may as well order you shot," growled their inquisitor. "Nothing short of death ever teaches a Yankee his place."

"And not even death will teach a Yankee that his place is beneath a fellow like you," retorted Dan contemptuously.

"Enough!" snarled the officer. "Men, take these Yankee pigs and tie them. We will shoot them on their knees as soon as we have more light."

A dozen of the soldiers advanced to obey the order. Dave let his fist fly at the first soldier to reach him. The wretch tottered, but Darrin caught the fellow in his arms, raising him aloft and hurling him into the face of the next soldier.

"Shoot them where they stand, men!" yelled the officer, reaching for his own revolver.

"If Benedito's revolution succeeds," Dave shouted back, "your chief will have trouble ex-

plaining to the United States the death of two of its officers."

"We will say that Rova's wolves killed you," sneered the officer. "That story will be as good as any other, and for want of proof the Yankee government will have to believe it."

A soldier had pressed the muzzle of his rifle against Dan's breast, but Dalzell struck up the weapon, wrenched it away from the soldier and wheeled to brain the officer.

But Dave stepped between them.

"Stop this foolishness, Captain!" roared Ensign Darrin, in his best quarter-deck voice. "If you kill us you will still have to deliver to General Benedito that which you will find upon us, and which we are bearing to His Excellency. You will also have to explain to your chief why you slew the bearers. Nor do I think General Benedito will accept the excuses you may make."

Apparently the *insurrecto* captain began to have his own doubts as to the wisdom of his actions, for he suddenly threw up one hand with a gesture of authority.

"Hold!" he ordered. "We will let these Yankees prove whether they are friends to our great chieftain. Now, then, Yankees, show me what you have for General Benedito."

"We have this," replied Dave, taking the plush case from his pocket. "Stop, fellow! Don't

attempt to take it from my hands. You shall see it, but I shall keep it. Give us a light, Dan."

While Dalzell reached for his match box and struck a light, Darrin continued:

"This, at General Benedito's own request, is what we have to turn over to him, and we are going to give it to him with our own hands."

In the light afforded by the burning match, the rebel captain bent over the opened box.

Then his gaze fell upon the diamond and ruby cross. In an instant he had straightened up, clumsily executing a military salute that neither ensign took the trouble to return.

"*Soldados!*" (soldiers) called the officer. "You will accord these officers the greatest respect and service. They are indeed bearers to our great chief, President Benedito."

Then, bowing to Dave and Dan, he added:

"*Caballeros*, you have ten thousand of my humblest apologies. I did not dream that what you told me was true."

"You took us for liars?" Dave demanded.

"You are placing me in an awkward position, Señor," almost whined the captain. "You are military men yourselves, and surely you will agree that on the battlefield one cannot be too careful, nor too credulous of the tales told by strangers."

"We will say no more about it now, Captain,"

The Rebel Captain Bent Over.

Dave rejoined, "but I do not forgive your affronts. You will ask your commander to see that we have guides to take us at once to General Benedito himself. And it may be that General Benedito will know how to punish those who treat us with any lack of consideration."

There was no need to say more to this captain. He was now humility itself.

"I feel sure, *caballeros*," he protested, mildly, "that you will realize that whatever I said or did was prompted by my loyalty to my chief."

"We can discuss that later," Dave suggested icily. "For the present you may content yourself with furthering our mission. Send us or take us to the officer who will see that we are sent as rapidly as possible to General Benedito."

"I shall give myself the honor of going with you, to show my devotion to your service," replied the captain softly. Then he gave an only half-uttered command to the sergeant with him, who instantly formed the soldiers by twos.

"This way, if you will be so good, *caballeros*," begged the captain, leading the way, while the soldier escort fell in behind the American officers.

"There's a wonderful change in this fellow's manner," grinned Dan to his chum.

"Yes," Dave assented. "For a moment I thought there would be fulfilment of Captain Potter's prediction of our finding early graves."

The two young ensigns were talking in English now, a tongue with which they felt satisfied their guide was not familiar.

As they moved on Dave and Dan found the forest full of military detachments. Darrin was certain that the rebels greatly outnumbered the late General Enrico's vanquished command.

Thrice their conductor halted to ask his way of other officers whom he met. At last, however, the captain led them up to a tree where, in the darkness, smoking a huge cigar, sat a man attended by half a dozen others.

"General Garcia," announced the captain humbly, "I do myself the honor of presenting two American officers who were with the Rovistas, but whose mission was to reach our lines, and to proceed to his excellency, President Benedito, bearing to him —"

Here the captain paused until he had bent forward far enough to whisper something in Garcia's ear.

That general, a smooth-faced young man of thirty, rose quickly.

"Present the Americans, Captain," he ordered.

Introductions were at once made.

"Be good enough, *caballeros*," he requested, to show me that which you bear to his excellency, President Benedito."

A crude lantern was lighted and brought

forward. By its rays Garcia inspected the cross as it reposed in the plush box. Then, instantly, he straightened up, next bowing.

"It is well," he said. "*Caballeros*, you shall have my full protection and such poor service as I may be able to offer you."

"Our only wish, General," Darrin replied, "is to be sent, as early as possible, on our way to General Benedito."

"At daylight you shall have an escort," replied General Garcia. "It will not be wise for you to start earlier, for you might encounter a superior force of Rovistas. I cannot very well turn my entire command back, for that would be the same as defeat by the Rovistas."

A "Rovista," in the parlance of the country, was a follower of President Rova. In the same way, an adherent of General Benedito would be known as a "Beneditista." It is a handy little Spanish way of naming parties or factions after their respective leaders.

"It is yet three hours to daylight," continued Garcia. "Will it not please you to lie down and get some sleep?"

"If there is not to be any more fighting," Dave assented.

"There will be no more fighting unless the Rovistas attack us," answered the rebel general, with a smile that bared his white, wolfish teeth.

"I do not believe the Rovistas will have recovered from their fright before daylight."

At the order some forty *soldados* made the forest ring with the noise of cutting stakes and brush. Within ten minutes other soldiers had erected a brush shack and had strewn the ground with fragrant green leaves over which blankets were spread.

As one side of the shack had been left wholly open, the young officers did not lack for fresh air.

At once, after taking courteous leave of General Garcia and his staff, Dave and Dan lay down. At a distance a sentry paced, to insure their freedom from annoyance, but near enough to overhear the young American officers as they lay and whispered in English.

"What on earth can be the meaning of that cross?" Dalzell wanted to know.

"It must signify more than its mere value, great though even that must be," guessed Dave.

"Of course," nodded Danny Grin. "All the rebel officers appear to know the real meaning of the cross, for on first glance at it they become as polite as so many dancing masters."

"When we reach General Benedito," suggested Dave, "we may learn the meaning of the jewel."

"We *may*," assented Dan, dubiously. "Of one thing I am wholly sure — we shall not learn

anything that Benedito thinks ought to be kept a secret."

"At least," argued Dave, "from the respect which a sight of the cross secures us from Benedito's officers, we may be almost certain that the rebel chief himself will receive us with real joy."

"I hope so," sighed Dan. "Since dark, however, this adventure has lost much of its aspect of romance to me. What those wretches did to General Enrico —"

"Please don't speak of it now," begged Darrin. "The remembrance will haunt me. What I want now is some real sleep, for I have an idea that daylight will find us at the beginning of a long, hard road to travel."

Just as the first rays of sunlight were showing in streaks between the forest trees Dave Darrin was awakened by a chorus of wavering shouts:

"*Viva Benedito! Viva Benedito!*"

Sitting up, Darrin stared with wide-open, horrified eyes at a tragic scene being enacted within plain sight of the shack.

Some two hundred men in the Rovista uniforms stood in a compact mass, under guard of some two-score Beneditistas.

General Garcia and three of his staff officers stood looking at the scene.

"Now, what's going to happen?" demanded Dan Dalzell, awakening more slowly and sitting up.

"I have an idea," faltered Dave, "but I hate to think of it."

"*Viva Benedito!*" wavered the prisoners again.

Sternly General Garcia held up his hand for silence.

"You dogs!" he thundered, "do you think I am fool enough to believe your wild clamor of lying loyalty? Captain, to your work."

Captain Ferrara, who had been the guide of the young ensigns the night before, now marched forward with a squad of infantrymen.

"Remember, Captain, that cartridges are worth their weight in gold," admonished the general.

Turning and saluting, Ferrara gave his orders to his men. Forty of the shrinking prisoners were counted off and then lined up in eight files of five men each. Not one of the prisoners protested, or pleaded for mercy. Eight infantrymen, loading their rifles, now stepped forward. White to the lips, Dave and Dan watched the revolting scene.

In front of each file of five men, a soldier stationed himself, placing the muzzle of his rifle directly over the heart of the foremost man in each file.

"Fire!" ordered Captain Ferrara.

Eight rifles spoke out as one. Each bullet so fired went through the hearts of five men in succession. After the forty poor wretches had

fallen, only one showed signs of life. He was quickly knocked on the head with the butt of a soldier's rifle.

It was terrible, but it was the way in which such wars are fought in countries like Vengara.

"Bring out the next lot," uttered General Garcia sharply. "We cannot spend too much time over such stupid work."

General Garcia heard Darrin's voice and turned to smile. He did not understand English, but at least he caught some of the tone of the remark.

"So you are awake, my good Americans," he called cordially. "Come here and you shall see something at closer range. I am sorry that the sport is so stupid, but still —"

"General," demanded Dave huskily, as he strode to Garcia's side, "will you do me the great favor of delaying the executions until I have had two minutes' conversation with you?"

"I shall be delighted to converse with you," smiled the rebel general, again displaying his wolfish teeth, "but I cannot delay the executions. Time presses and these dirty cattle of Rovistas are not worth delay."

"General Garcia," Dave pressed hotly, "did you ever read the rules of civilized warfare as they are now and practised by the most civilized nations of the earth?"

"I do not need to read any rules," objected the

rebel commander. "The only rules of war, anywhere, are to win battles and to kill the enemy."

"General," Dave continued, trying to be as impressive as he could, "the most highly civilized and humane nations of the world have united in laying down rules imposed upon all soldiers who possess true manhood."

"Manhood?" asked Garcia. "That is nothing but a mingling of bravery and ferocity."

"Manhood," Dave retorted sternly, "includes truth, justice, honor, *mercy* and all attributes of whatever is divine in man."

General Garcia laughed, drawing at his cigar and blowing out rings of smoke.

"War in this part of the world, General," broke in Danny Grin, "is looked upon by all the peoples of the stronger nations with horror. Do you realize what the soldiers of such countries as yours are called by the people of Europe and America?"

"What are they called?" asked Garcia calmly.

"Brutes and murderers," Dan responded spiritedly. "It is a saying in my country that there need be no surprise over the number of bandits in such a country as Vengara, for the reason that the cruelties practised in your wars cannot fail to breed the instincts of bandits in your citizens."

"In what respect are we bandits?" demanded General Garcia, losing some of his composure.

"In such deeds as the one we just now witnessed," Dave replied. "Among civilized nations prisoners of war have sacred rights. They are not executed just because they have been enemies. A general of our country would be tried by his government for murder if he were to slay prisoners taken in war."

"Then your people cannot have the true fighting instinct," replied General Garcia, with a slight smile. "Your men must be much too soft-hearted to be real soldiers."

"It is a saying among us," Dave rejoined, "that the bravest and truest men are the gentlest. 'Brave as a lion, gentle as a dove,' is another saying of ours."

"But I forget," broke in Garcia hastily. "I am remiss in my duties to my great chieftain. You should now be on your way to him. Colonel Rabato, tell Major Lima to bring up the escort. *Caballeros*, you shall march two miles on your way, and then your escort will halt for breakfast. If you fail to receive every courtesy on the way, I trust and beg that you will report the fact to President Benedito on your arrival at his headquarters."

A bugle sounded at once. Soldiers hastened to join their command. A battalion of four companies of infantry marched up, Major Lima saluting the general.

"Major Lima, the *caballeros* are ready," reported General Garcia. "They will march with you."

One of the four companies instantly marched off down the road as advance guard. Major Lima led Dave and Dan to the head of the remaining companies. At the word to march two of the remaining companies stepped off, the fourth company of the battalion starting a little later as a rear guard.

"Promise me, even if only for this once," Dave murmured, in taking leave of the general, "that none of your present prisoners will be shot or unnecessarily mistreated."

"I shall conduct myself as a soldier and as a loyal Vengaran," replied Garcia smilingly.

Heavy-hearted, Dave stepped off with Dan and the rebel major. Two minutes later they were in the deep forest, marching over the mere semblance of a road.

Then, of a sudden, the report of the rifles of a small firing squad reached their ears.

Dave Darrin started, then looked at his chum.

"No need to say it," muttered Dalzell gloomily.

"One can't keep still," retorted Dave.

"I'd like to take that brute a prisoner of war," muttered Dan.

Major Lima was paying no heed. Evidently he knew no English.

"If you did take him a prisoner of war," remarked Darrin, "you couldn't do anything to him. It wouldn't be in your nature, Danny boy, to break the rules of civilized warfare."

"I don't remember seeing anything in the rules against scaring a fellow to death!" muttered Dalzell vindictively.

"You couldn't scare a fellow like Garcia," Dave argued. "That fellow knows the rules of the fighting game in his own country, and he is always prepared for what will surely happen to him if he falls alive into the hands of his foes. But hark!"

"Another volley," nodded Dan, his lips twitching. "I can see the whole horrible picture as plainly as if I were looking on."

Presently there came the sound of still another volley. Afterwards they heard two more.

"I guess that accounts for two hundred prisoners," shuddered Dave. "What an awful thing to do before breakfast!"

"Yes, and how cheerful it ought to make us," grimaced Danny Grin. "The man we're going to see is the chap who is responsible for such shocking atrocities. He may do the same by thousands of helpless men before this war is over."

"Our minds will truly be full of the pleasant reception we shall receive," said Dave Darrin dryly.

CHAPTER XIII

MAJOR LIMA HEARS SOMETHING

ON that day's march, as nearly as Dave could judge, they traveled some sixteen miles.

The lean, lithe, barefooted soldiers went along nimbly, tirelessly, but the two young American officers, booted and accustomed mainly to the short stretches of a ship's deck, felt the day's work, and were glad when a halt was ordered just before dark.

Men were detailed to cut stakes and brush, and a shack was erected for the use of Major Lima and his guests. No shelter was provided for the company officers or their men.

Over screened campfires strong coffee was made, and black beans were boiled to something like softness. Rice was cooked, but only for the American and rebel officers.

Of this plain fare Dave and Dan ate heartily, for the work of the day had given them keen appetites, and the noon meal had been only the shadow of a repast.

"Tell me something of your country," requested Major Lima, in Spanish, as the officers

sat about after eating. "I know how great it is, for I have studied geography. And I know how great some of its people must be, for I see before me two Yankees."

Major Lima finished his implied compliment by bowing and then he added:

"Of course all Americans do not measure up to your standards."

"Why not?" Dave inquired.

"Because," explained the major, "you are gentlemen, you are scholars, and also travelers."

"The same education that we have had," Dave replied, "is open to any American boy who wants to take the schooling. We were educated in a public grammar school, open to any boy in our town. From there we went to a public high school, also open to any boy in town. From high school we went to the Naval Academy at Annapolis. And now you have the record of all our schooling."

"But is the Naval Academy open to every boy in the country?" asked Major Lima.

"No; only those who are appointed midshipmen in the Navy may go there."

"Ah! And your Naval Academy is like a great university."

"Yes, but many States in our country have State universities where there are no charges for instruction, and any boy living in that State

may attend his State university if he has passed through the high school. Even in the universities where fees are charged, there are, in all, thousands of boys who are working their way through. In the United States, Major, no healthy boy, who is determined to go through the public schools and college, can really be prevented from doing so."

"Why is it, do you think, my friend, that we do not have such school training for all in Vengara?"

"I fear you would not like my answer," Darrin answered.

"I am seeking knowledge," answered Major Lima, simply. "I beg that you will answer me."

"Well, then," Dave answered thoughtfully, "in a country like Vengara how many revolutions do you have in the course of about twenty years?"

"From three to ten, I should say," replied Major Lima, frankly.

"And in each revolution it is likely that thousands are killed."

"It is true," assented the major.

"You choose for your fighters, your best and strongest young men, for it is such who are used in war, and you kill them off. You teach your best and most capable young men to fight rather than to think."

"But does not your country fight?" asked the major slowly.

"Yes. There are some wars that must be fought, but war should never be permitted unless there is no other way of settling a great question. American historians have calculated that our wars are about thirty-three years apart. Thus we do not keep up a continual killing-off of the strongest and most useful of our manhood."

"This present war against the tyrant, Rova, is necessary," replied Major Lima stoutly. "After we have won, and have driven Rova from the country, perhaps we shall not have war again in a long time."

"How will your leader, Benedito, prevent other revolutions from springing up?" asked Dalzell.

"Why, he will order execution in the case of every man whom he knows to be his enemy," replied the major, smiling blandly.

"I am afraid I'll have to give it up," muttered Dan in English. "These people prefer fighting to spelling books, and all the arithmetic they need is to know how to count up the number of executions!"

"Yet we have our universities," pursued Major Lima. "We have our scholars, too. Our universities confer the degrees of Doctor of Philosophy and Doctor of Laws on many of our finest men."

"Do your peons (laborers) ever receive university degrees?" inquired Dave.

"Certainly not," responded the major.

"In my country," Darrin went on, "a very large percentage of our university men are poor boys and sons of toiling parents. At Annapolis a large percentage of the young men are the sons of men who work for a daily wage. Everywhere in our country the very poor boy has such a chance that, if he has brains and ambition, he can't be held back."

"It is all very strange," murmured Major Lima bewilderedly. "When President Benedito rules over the whole of Vengara again perhaps some one more distinguished than I will present to him such aspects of the question as you have just shown me."

It was on the tip of Dave Darrin's tongue to say:

"Benedito knows all and more than I have told you, but he does not care to have his people too well educated. If they were, their first act would be to drive him from power forever. José Benedito derives all his power and his wealth from the fact that he knows how to use the men of Vengara against each other. An educated and intelligent nation would have no use for a plundering Benedito."

But Dave did not say it. He well knew that

such utterly treasonable words as these would be reported to Benedito, who would then, beyond a doubt, punish the two young ensigns in the way that had made Vengara notorious.

Besides, such words, once they reached the ex-dictator's ears, would make it impossible for Ensigns Dave and Dan to carry out their own daring plan.

There was silence after that. Had they been by themselves, the assembled rebel officers might have discussed the campaign that was now being fought out, but it was not the Vengaran way to talk over their military secrets in the presence of outsiders.

"It is time that we sleep," announced Major Lima, at last. He extended a hand to each of his charges.

"You are not offended, Major, with my outspoken comparison of the American and the Vengaran ways?" Dave asked.

"Not offended," replied Major Lima. "I am thinking. I am especially impressed with what you have said, my friend, about the education of the *peon*. This is a revolution undertaken on behalf of the *peon*."

"Alas, yes, and so is every other Central and South American revolution," Dave told himself. "And, outside of the big chance of death, all that any *peon* gets out of a revolution he can put in

his straw hat and lose it in the smallest crack between two layers of straw."

In the morning, there was, as on the day before, a hasty breakfast after the first two miles had been marched, then more marching, followed by a scanty luncheon.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon a runner, who had been sent on ahead of the advanced company, came back with the news that Benedito's camp was less than a mile ahead.

At that cheering news the battalion increased its gait.

"I am wondering how Benedito will really receive us," Dave murmured to his comrade.

"And I," responded Danny Grin, "am wondering what he will do to us."

"Then change step," smiled Darrin, "and wonder how we are going to accomplish what we plan to do to him!"

CHAPTER XIV

"AT HOME" WITH A RATTLESNAKE

A LIEUTENANT of the advance guard company, who had hastened on ahead, had announced to the ex-dictator, now once more in the saddle in his own country, the arrival of Darrin and Dalzell.

Almost immediately the advancing battalion passed strong outposts of infantry. Here and there batteries of field pieces guarded the approach to the rebel chieftain. Then regiment after regiment was passed. Dave Darrin judged that Benedito must be living in the midst of at least twenty thousand troops.

A planter's broad, low white house, of cement and stucco, stood on the crest of a low hill. The green blinds and the broad verandas gave an appearance of coolness.

On the front veranda lounged many officers, a number of them sure-enough military dandies, who gave great care and thought to their glittering side-arms and their brightly polished spurs.

Halting the battalion, Major Lima led his charges forward in person. Out through the

broad doorway came José Benedito, the man whom the young ensigns had once known by the name of Pasquale Gorgo.

"Welcome, my dear friends, and thrice welcome!" cried the rebel chieftain, as he strode across the porch and down the steps to meet his young naval visitors.

Had his welcome impressed them as being wholly heartfelt, Dave and Dan might have felt secretly ashamed of the real errand that had brought them here.

But Benedito's manner, as he shook hands with them, was so far from seeming genuine that both believed Benedito would yet play them as false as he played all whom he suspected.

"You have gone to great trouble to return that little bauble," he cried jovially. "But I shall show you how Benedito can appreciate — how Benedito can be grateful and fittingly repay! But come inside. You have traveled far to give me this pleasure, and you are hot, dusty and tired."

Receiving the salute of Major Lima, who now fell back, José Benedito then led the way up the steps.

"*Caballeros*," he called to his officers on the porch, "you will take note of my friends, Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell, of the United States Navy. It was Ensign Darrin who connived at my escape

through the net that had been set to catch me at the coast."

How Dave longed to throw that lie back into the teeth of the general! As it was, he merely bowed in acknowledgment of the many profound bows directed to the young Americans.

"And now come inside, and refresh yourselves," begged Benedito.

First he took them to an anteroom, where servants provided them with soap, water and towels. Still other servants deftly brushed the dust from their clothing and boots. All the while Benedito stood by, smiling blandly, yet in a way that aroused the suspicions of Ensign Dave Darrin.

"Now, come with me," begged the rebel chieftain. "Come, and we shall talk much and to friendly purpose."

Somehow, Dave felt that he would have been much more reassured had the other's attitude been rather openly hostile.

"He has something bad up his sleeve for us," Dave found chance to murmur to his comrade.

"That was the chance we took in coming here," Dalzell stoutly replied.

The rebel chieftain led his guests to a large, though simply furnished drawing room in which there were, among other furnishings, three desks covered with documents.

No servant followed them in here, but four

staff officers were already present. To these Benedito introduced his guests.

"Now, come over here and be seated," begged the ex-dictator.

He led them to seats on a divan, taking a chair facing them.

"General Benedito," Dave began, "before anything more is said or done, I beg you to permit me to return your jeweled cross."

"At your convenience, *caballeros*," responded Benedito, with a wave of the hand.

But Dave drew forth the plush box and handed it over at once. The rebel chieftain received it, smiling and bowing his thanks, then sat down without opening the box.

"Will you do us the favor of inspecting the cross?" Dave asked.

Instantly and with another bow, José Benedito opened the box and closely examined the handsome piece of jewelry.

"It is in perfect condition," he murmured. "Major Tamuren, will you do me the kindness to put it in the safe?"

Instantly one of the officers hastened over, taking the box and going with it to a safe in a far corner of the large room.

These staff officers pacing about the room got on Darrin's nerves. They made him think of so many caged lions, watching and wondering

whether it would be safe to leap upon the intruders in their cage.

"Probably they're always here when visitors are received," Dave concluded inwardly. "Doubtless they are here to make sure that no one attempts to assassinate the ex-dictator."

But aloud he said:

"General Benedito, I was much impressed by the fact that all of your officers who saw or knew that I had your cross in my possession appeared to know all about it, and to hold the cross in veneration. Am I permitted to ask if it is some sort of talisman — something to ward off harm or to bring great luck to the possessor?"

Benedito, who apparently had forgotten that he had formerly denied ownership of the bauble, replied with seeming frankness now:

"It is a sort of passport to my favor — a token by which those who serve me can know who is to be protected and aided."

"That explains, then," Darrin pursued, "why it was that, though I was found by your men just after I had been separated from General Enrico's column, the sight of the jeweled cross caused them to treat me with great courtesy instead of shooting me as they had threatened to do."

"Had you not had the cross," replied the rebel leader calmly, "they undoubtedly would have shot you."

"The more particularly," smiled Dave, with such carelessness of manner as he could assume, "as I then carried, and still carry, a pass from Adjutant General Panfilo of the Rovista forces."

"Without the cross you would undoubtedly have gone to your graves," laughed Benedito. "How did it happen," he asked, curiously, "that you had such a pass through the lines of my enemies?"

"Because it was necessary to get through your enemies' lines before I could reach you," Dave replied. "That pass stated that my errand was to visit this district to look after the concerns of Americans or Europeans who might be in danger from either the Beneditistas or the Rovistas. While I am here I trust you will give me every chance to see such Americans or Europeans as may live in this district so I may assure myself that they are safe and unmolested."

"Ha, ha! I understand," laughed the rebel chief. "Like all the men of your nation, you are extremely conscientious. Having received such a pass from Panfilo, you would salve your conscience by actually seeing and talking with all the residents of this district who come from your country or from Europe."

"I wish to do more than salve my conscience," Dave smiled back. "I wish to live wholly up to the terms on which the pass was issued."

"I understand," declared Benedito. "It is very excellent of you, and I shall do all in my power to aid you. This more especially as we are not mistreating any foreigner who lives among us. We wish the good will of all nations."

As Benedito spoke excellent English, most of the conversation was carried on in that tongue. None of the staff officers appeared to understand English.

"And now I must return," went on the rebel leader presently, "to the cross. I will tell you its purpose, and how I was balked in my design for its use. I wished to bring my wife into this country, and to have her with me to witness the triumphs that are coming. I could not undertake to bring her with me when I first entered Vengara. The risk to her would have been too great. But I planned that an English sea-captain of my acquaintance should bring her down on his schooner from Honduras. He was to have been on the mole at Colon, but, seeing you there, and believing that the 'Panama' was in this part of the world in order to head me off in my plans, he kept away from the pier while you were there. I sent my negro servant with the package, and had very carefully described the appearance of my friend, the captain. I had also told him about Messrs. Darrin and Dalzell. In some way the stupid idiot got it into his head that he was to

deliver the package to a captain whose name was Darrin. So he handed it to you, and when he came back he stated that the package had been delivered as I ordered. So I came to Vengara, slipping in with the aid of a fishing boat, and supposed that Señora Benedito would soon be here. As I married her abroad since my last term as President, she would need the cross as a help to get through the lines of my troops. It was not until I talked with you at La Choya that I realized the crazy blunder my negro servant had made. So Señora Benedito must still be in Honduras, and will not witness my triumphs until they are completed and Vengara is at peace. But I will say no more of the idiotic servant. He sleeps."

"Sleeps?" queried Ensign Darrin.

"He is buried."

"Buried?"

"I assigned four soldiers to attend to him," replied Benedito, calmly. "He was shot."

"Shot?" gasped Dave. Then with reproach very plain in his look and tone, the young ensign asked: "Wasn't death a very severe punishment for a mistake?"

"Death," rejoined the ex-dictator, coolly, "is very often an excellent cure for stupidity and bad judgment."

"Let us change the subject, if you will be so

good, General Benedito," the young naval officer urged, doing his best to smile in the face of this heartless monster. "The gentleness with which you kill people in South America is a topic that disturbs one with Yankee training."

"It shall be as you wish," granted the rebel chieftain, with a wave of his hand. "The negro shall not be mentioned again. His fate was a matter of not even trifling importance. Are you interested in my campaign?"

"Very much," Dave assured him.

"You have seen some of the fighting?"

"I was present when General Enrico's column was defeated."

"Wiped out should be the word; not defeated," corrected Benedito, gently. "I have heard some tales of the fighting in Europe, but probably you have heard much more. Tell me, in your opinion are the battles in Europe fought with any more bravery than shown by my *soldados* in the face of an enemy?"

"There is hardly any comparison," Darrin smiled.

"And why not, if you will be so good as to tell me, my dear Señor Darrin?" purred the rebel chieftain.

"Well, for one thing," Dave went on, "your battles here are fought in the forests, in the deep shade cast by huge trees."

"And in Europe?" pursued the would-be dictator.

"Why, in Europe vast bodies of men are employed. The passage of such droves of men here would trample down all the tangle of jungle that here acts as a screen. Then again, in a battle in Europe, thousands of cannon are employed, and even such trees as these monsters here would be swept away clear to their stumps."

"But at least we are quick, and we win," asserted José Benedito.

"Can you carry on all of your campaigns as swiftly and successfully?" Dave asked.

Benedito laughed contemptuously.

"The new revolution is a complete success," he boasted. "The Rovistas fear my triumph, but they do not look for me to come out of the hills for many weeks yet. It is in that belief that they sleep too soundly. Inside of a week I shall reach La Choya, and three days after that the capital of Vengara will be in my possession. The revolution will have succeeded almost as soon as it began. My speed will destroy my enemies."

Something in the revolutionary warrior's face gave Dave Darrin an instantly disagreeable shock.

"Benedito is never indiscreetly talkative," the young ensign muttered to himself. "If he tells me so much, *it is because he has already re-*

solved that I shall not live to escape and get away with the news!"

In the same instant the same thought entered the keen mind of Ensign Danny Grin!

CHAPTER XV

TWO ENSIGNS HEAR REAL NEWS

IT was evening. For two hours the headquarters house had been brightly lighted by many kerosene lamps.

In the great dining-room of the mansion José Benedito had introduced the young American naval officers to a dozen of his more important staff officers.

A meal of almost surpassing luxury had been served. At the conclusion of the long repast Benedito had asked the two officers seated on each side of him to exchange seats with Darrin and Dalzell, with whom he now conversed in English.

"You speak Spanish excellently, *caballeros*!" observed the rebel chieftain, whom the meal had evidently put in a very amiable frame of mind.

"That is a compliment, General, for which

you are entitled to our thanks," Dave replied smilingly.

"You have heard the talk at the table this evening," pursued Benedito. "Tell me, now, on your honor as officers and gentlemen, do you not consider our revolution as an assured success?"

"I have no doubt, General, that it stands a good chance of being a success for yourself, and that probably your most valued adherents will share in that success."

"But for the people of the Republic of Vengara?" insisted the former dictator. "Do you not think my victory will spell success for them also?"

"In the sense in which we Americans understand the word, General," replied Ensign Dave Darrin gravely, fearlessly, "there is no such thing as the Republic of Vengara."

"And why not?" questioned Benedito almost sharply, much of the look of amiability vanishing from his face.

"Because, General, a republic is a country in which all of the citizens have a share in the government. Here, those who stand closest to you, and whose service is most valued by yourself are, as I take it, the only ones who will be benefited by the change of government."

José Benedito frowned. Dave continued: "Among your enlisted men, and many of the

junior officers, I find the impression that this revolution has been undertaken with the avowed purpose of securing rights to the *peons* who make up the greater part of the population of Vengara."

"Well —?" began Benedito, then paused interrogatively.

"Will the *peons* really be benefited if your revolution wins, General?"

"After I have won, my American friend, the *peons* will find that they have plenty of work to do."

"They have enough work to do now," pressed Darrin. "But will they be paid better wages after your victory? Will they be able to enforce the payment of the wages they have been promised?"

"Under my new government," replied José Benedito, "the *peons* will have all the rights that may properly be granted them."

"But your representatives are making many promises to these poor laborers. Do you intend to keep those promises when the revolution is ended?"

José Benedito shrugged his shoulders, with a smile which plainly expressed his belief that the conversation was taking a ridiculous turn.

"Since you have been sufficiently interested, General, to ask my opinion," Dave went on, "I will say that the people of my own country al-

ways feel that every new revolution in South America promises worlds of good to the common people, but that those promises are never realized."

The rebel chieftain bowed his head gravely.

"Do you believe, sir," Darrin went on, "that the day will ever come in South America when the promises made to the masses of the plain people will be kept religiously?"

"Oh, yes," laughed the former dictator, "that day will come!"

"When, sir?" Dave ventured to inquire.

"It will happen," laughed the rebel chieftain, "in the same year that a political party in your own country, when elected to power, keeps every pledge made in the platform on which that party was elected to power by your simple-minded voters."

Ensign Dan Dalzell could not keep from laughing outright.

"That reply ought to hold you for a while, David, little giant," chuckled Dan.

"I will admit, General, that that was an excellent conversational bomb to hand back to me," said Darrin, laughing and bowing.

"Then you will admit that there is no very great difference between political parties in Vengara and those of your own country?" questioned the rebel chieftain.

"In our country," Dave responded, "we do not march out those who disagree with us, and shoot them in squads," retorted Dave. "In fact, the victory of a political party in the United States is not attended by bloodshed in any form. Nor do we impose so-called taxes on foreigners that really amount to blackmail levied under threats of death."

"Nor do I treat foreigners thus," retorted Benedito, with some heat.

"Reports have come down to the coast, sir, that you are forcing contributions to your war chest from American and European planters, and that the planters dare not refuse the money so demanded."

"That is an infamous lie!" flared the rebel chieftain, with such heat that an onlooker would have been much tempted to believe him sincere. Then, raising his voice, and speaking in Spanish, Benedito addressed his officers present.

"Gentlemen," he thundered, "our enemies are saying that I am plundering native and foreign planters as well, forcing them to pay in money under threats that their refusal will bring death to their doors. If any of you has heard of any such instances, I command that officer to speak."

"Why, no, my General," came almost in one chorus, "we have heard of no such happenings. Such tales are lies."

"You hear and understand?" demanded Benedito, gazing in turn at each of his American guests.

"It is very reassuring, sir, to hear such denials," Dave answered dryly.

"Then I hope you will carry back to your fellow-Americans the truth, that all such stories are abominable lies," Benedito went on warmly. "Moreover, I have not forgotten that General Panfilo, despicable tool of Rova, has given you both passes that you might come as far as my lines, for the purpose of gathering such details as possible of my treatment of the foreign planters in this section. That is good! I will hurl the truth back into the teeth of Panfilo and of other Rovista liars. In the morning you shall be allowed to visit at least a score of large planters in this neighborhood. You shall have a chance to see these planters and to talk with them alone. Then, at your own good convenience, you shall be escorted safely back to the coast, that you may publish to your government, and to the world at large, the fact that I have not assessed even a dollar against any planter in this neighborhood, and that I have not annoyed one of them in any way whatever. You shall have opportunity to investigate, most fully, the truth of this statement."

"I fear there will be time for us to see only a

few of the American and but one or two of the European planters," Darrin replied.

"Surely, you do not plan to leave us so soon!" cried José Benedito, in real or pretended astonishment.

"As our mission is a hurried one," Ensign Dave went on, "I do not feel that we should remain here more than forty-eight hours longer. I trust you will feel at liberty to furnish us a guide as far as the federal lines of the Rovistas."

"By the time you are ready to go back," replied the rebel chieftain, "there won't be any federal lines except my own."

"Surely, General, you are not going to ask us to remain here longer than forty-eight hours?" Dave all but demanded, looking Benedito fully in the eyes.

"You are friends of mine, and I am at your orders," the ex-dictator answered glibly.

Soon after that the rebel chieftain gave the rising sign. As he stood up he turned to the two American naval officers to say:

"I shall now be busy with affairs of the revolution. I will have a servant show you to the room you are to occupy. After that you are urged to do whatever will please you most. If I am at liberty early enough in the evening, I may be able to give myself the pleasure of further conversation with you, if that would be equally

agreeable to yourselves. Until then, my very good friends, *adios*."

It was said so graciously that Dave and Dan were all but tempted to believe that their strange host regarded them with full confidence.

A servant took them to their room, which proved to be a spacious apartment on the second floor. There were six windows to the room; a light evening breeze was stirring, but the air was very warm.

At one end of the room, side by side, stood two beds, each with a light canopy of mosquito netting. The bedsteads were of costly dark wood. Over the mattress of each was spread a wide, soft grass mat. The night was likely to be too warm for bed clothing to be used, yet sheets and thin blankets were spread over a chest at the foot of each bed. On top of the bedding lay suits of silk pajamas.

The sweet scents of flowers drifted in on the air. The large room, while not crowded with furniture, presented an aspect of luxury.

"Don José is a generous host," murmured Dave. "But, if I were the owner of this mansion I should not care to see my home turned over to the various uses of war."

"We weren't introduced to the owner of this estate," suggested Dan, with a sudden flash of recollection.

"Possibly the owner 'sleeps,'" hinted Ensign Darrin grimly.

"Don't," urged Danny Grin, making a face. "When I think of the easy way in which troublesome enemies or over-anxious friends are handled in this country, it makes me feel 'creepy.'"

"Keep your nerves under control," urged Dave, in a low tone. "Of course you realize the real business that has brought us here."

"I begin now to understand how impossible it will be to put that business through," Dalzell replied, in a whisper. "David, little giant, we haven't a chance in the world to seize this rebel chieftain and take him as a captive through his own lines."

"We must!" Ensign Darrin answered with emphasis.

"But it's impossible."

"American naval officers must never feel that anything is impossible in the line of duty," Darrin retorted.

"We can't possibly seize Benedito and take him through the lines of this really large army, and you know it."

"We have to do it, and therefore we're going to do it," Dave Darrin insisted. "At the worst, we must make the attempt, and then, if we fail, we can do nothing more than 'sleep' at Don José's whim."

"We'll soon 'sleep,' all right," Dan predicted, not glumly, but with an air of deep conviction.

"Let it be so, then," Darrin agreed. "I'd sooner sleep in a Vengaran forest than to go back to the 'Panama' with my mission a failure. So would you, Danny boy."

"Lead the way to the slumber-roll, then," begged Danny Grin dryly.

"But first," Dave suggested, "let us take a walk about the grounds, and perhaps farther. If we're to try to put our scheme through we can't know too much about the local map."

Accordingly both young ensigns left the room, going below, and out upon the porch. As they appeared several rebel staff officers saluted the Americans with grave courtesy.

After the pair had strolled off into the dark, Dan stepped close to his chum to whisper in the latter's ear:

"I feel almost treacherous to accept Don José's hospitality and courtesy when I think of circumstances that brought us here."

"The laws of hospitality are sacred," replied Ensign Darrin, shrugging his shoulders, "but in this instance the thousands of lives that our act, if successful, will save, are of vastly more importance. Don't forget that our failure will mean death to thousands of human beings, and misery, undoubtedly, to thousands more!"

"And to ourselves," supplemented Danny Grin.

Then the two chums changed the subject, strolling on. Here and there they were challenged by sentries, but an explanation from either young officer always secured permission to continue their stroll. It looked as though Don José must have given instructions regarding his guests to all the sentries.

For more than an hour the two chums walked slowly about, then turned, retracing their steps. They were within a quarter of a mile of the mansion when the sound of voices in a jungle thicket attracted their attention.

"Gentlemen," a voice was saying, and it was Don José's, "the young American naval officers' arrival here is most fortunate. I shall be able to play them right into our hands as the most effective tools!"

In a twinkling Dave Darrin had stopped short, gripping Dan Dalzell's arm in a meaning clutch.

"I have planned," Benedito continued, in his low, musical, cunning voice, "to make better use of them than could be had from an army corps of twenty thousand men backed by a dozen batteries of field artillery."

Though neither young American spoke, even in a whisper, Dave's and Dan's eyes sought each other's faces in the dark.

Don José Benedito began to speak again.

CHAPTER XVI

DON JOSÉ UNFOLDS THE PLOT

"EIGHT thousand more troops will join us the day after to-morrow," the rebel chieftain continued. "They are on their way now. It is my plan to have these young American officers write their commander that I am massing troops to clear the way to La Choya and capture that port. They will write that, for I shall find ways of making them do so. Beyond these eight thousand troops, other brigades are heading this way, as you know, and will soon be here. Six thousand men will be enough to make the necessary demonstrations toward the coast. I shall march the bulk of my forces through this forest and hurl them upon the capital, while the scoundrel, Rova, is making preparations to meet me on the roads to La Choya."

"But suppose, my General," put in a voice respectfully, "that the commander of the American warship does not send the information to the Rova government that you will cause the young naval officers to write him from here?"

"The American commander will be sure to

send that information to Rova," cried Don José angrily. "The American government is fighting me in every way, for the Yankees desire to see Rova win. Have no fear but that my trap will work. All that remains for my army to do is to march like an army of giants, and fall upon the capital with the suddenness of lightning. Then, with the capital taken and the treasury in our hands, La Choya will fall automatically, and the Rovista commanders will disband their brigades and implore me to spare their lives. Have no doubts, gentlemen. With the unexpected aid of the two young Americans, and the information that I shall cause them to send, the revolution will be ended within a fortnight or, at farthest, three weeks. There is nothing in sight for us but an easy and complete victory! Do you wonder that I said that these young Amercans, who serve their treacherous country officially, will be worth more to me than an army corps and many batteries of artillery?"

"If these young men do not balk," murmured a third voice. "My General, they appear to me to be courageous, even obstinate, young men. As fighting men, they may prefer death to helping you against their own country's plans."

"If the prospect of death is not enough to make them do my work," answered Don José Benedito calmly, "then do not forget, gentlemen,

that I have torture as my resort. Few men are so brave that they can long withstand the torture."

"And then the Yankee government would declare war upon us," hinted a fourth voice.

"Pah!" returned Don José contemptuously. "If we use the torture, and the United States government makes awkward inquiries concerning the fate of the young officers, we have only to report that both were slain while watching military operations, and that we buried the young men with all military honors. Only we ourselves will know that Darrin and Dalzell met their deaths at the hands of the torturers. Of course it will be easy to forget just where the naval officers were buried. The Yankee government might doubt, but it could prove nothing against us, so long as only those who now hear my voice know what really becomes of the young American officers."

"You are a born statesman, my General!" cried one of the listening rebel officers.

"Pah! There is no cleverness required. It is all easy," Don José continued. "Besides, Darrin and Dalzell may be so simple that I shall not have to resort to extreme measures with them. I shall continue to be so friendly and generous with them that they, suspecting nothing, will walk into the trap without a thought that they are playing my game instead of their own."

"Then you suspect that they *have* a game, my General?" inquired one of the rebel chieftain's hearers.

"Probably it is little more than a mission to see whether the foreign planters have been badly treated."

"And some of them have been," murmured a voice.

"Fool!" snapped Don José. "Do you think that I shall permit the young naval officers to hear anything to our discredit? Naturally, Darrin and Dalzell will not go where I do not desire them to go. It is growing late, my beloved officers, and a soldier should be astir early in the morning. Let us go back and to sleep."

Fortunately, the plotters, in leaving the thicket, did not have to pass the two naval officers, who instinctively crouched low until the footsteps of the Vengaran rebels had died out.

"Well," whispered Ensign Darrin, a savage light glowing in his eyes, "how do you feel now, Danny boy, about violating the hospitality that we have been enjoying here?"

"That scoundrel is going to use us to win his revolution, is he?" growled Daizell. "Sooner than have him do that I'm willing to die by torture, if there is no other way out of the predicament in which we have placed ourselves."

"There is a way out," Ensign Dave whispered

tensely in his chum's ear, "and we are going to find that way. The path must be broad enough for three, for that scoundrel *must* go with us."

"Or else swallow a dose of 'sleep' medicine himself," nodded Danny Grin dryly. "Let's go back, now, and meet the gentleman who plans to make life so interesting for us."

"We'll take a roundabout course, in order not to give Benedito a chance to suspect that we may have come by that isolated little arbor," Ensign Dave proposed.

From then on the two young officers chatted on various innocent topics, indifferent as to whether or not they were overheard.

Half an hour later they returned to the mansion.

Don José Benedito, sitting alone on the veranda, tossed away a half-smoked cigar, rising with every appearance of graciousness, to meet his young visitors.

"You have, perhaps, noticed how well my army is posted?" he suggested questioningly.

"We have been halted, at various points, by sentries," Dave replied.

"And treated in every case with courtesy, I hope?" Don José went on.

"In every instance," Darrin answered nodding.

"What do you think of my army?"

"General, beyond speaking with sentries or outposts, we have seen but little of your troops

this evening. Sometimes, in the distance, we have seen the campfires of a regiment, but we visited the camps of none of them."

"Then to-morrow morning, if you wish, gentlemen, you shall do so," replied the rebel chieftain.

"We shall find much pleasure, sir, in seeing anything that you may wish to show us," Dave resumed. "At the same time, General, we must not overlook our main object."

"Ah, yes; you will wish to visit and talk with some of the foreign planters in this district, and learn how they have fared at the hands of my officers and troops," continued the ex-dictator. "Quite so! You shall do so, and shall have every assistance from me."

At a signal, imperceptible to the young naval officers, several rebel staff officers now appeared and approached the chieftain. Don José made this an excuse to wish his American guests a gracious "good night." Darrin and Dalzell retired to their apartment, a servant having gone there before them and lighted the candles.

Dave bolted the door, after which the candles were extinguished and the chums undressed in the dark.

"We are going to find our job a difficult one," Dave whispered.

"An impossible one, I'm thinking," Dan answered.

"That isn't the Gridley spirit," Dave returned, in mild rebuke. "The more difficult the task the more certain we are of winning."

By six o'clock in the morning both young officers were astir. In a tiled closet off their apartment was a shower bath. Both quickly bathed and dressed.

"Breakfast will be served at eight o'clock," a staff officer informed them as they came out on the veranda.

"Suppose we take a little walk, before breakfast," Dave suggested to his chum. Together the young American officers strolled off down the path. Near the mansion the sentries allowed them to pass. At a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile they encountered a sentry who threw his rifle to port, stopping them.

"We are guests of Don José Benedito," Dave informed him, in Spanish, "and privileged to go about within the lines of the camp."

The sentry shook his head quietly.

"It may be so, *señores*," he replied, "but I have no instructions on that point."

"Will it be agreeable to you to call the sergeant of the guard?" Dan demanded.

At once the sentry did so. The sergeant, however, expressed his own doubts, passing word for the officer of the guard.

"I am extremely sorry, *caballeros*," replied

Captain Flores, "but I must plead absence of instructions allowing you to pass at will."

"Then there is nothing for us to do but to return to headquarters?" Dave inquired.

"I am extremely sorry, *caballeros*," rejoined Captain Flores, "but I can only say that the course you suggest appears to be the only wise one."

"Thank you," acknowledged Dave gravely saluting the Captain, who returned the courtesy.

The two young ensigns started back.

"This is different from last night," Dave murmured in an undertone.

"It is merely the beginning of real troubles soon to come," Dalzell answered. "This is the first putting on of the screws."

"And you imagine that soon the screws will be tightened?" Dave smiled.

"They will be put on hard and tight enough to make us wince," Danny Grin dryly returned.

"I am curious," Dave announced.

"About what?"

"I am waiting to note Don José's attitude and bearing when I tell him what has happened. His method of receiving the 'news' may enable us to guess what our future treatment is to be like."

As they neared the veranda their host, in uniform, and wearing the elaborate insignia of a general-in-chief, stepped outside.

"Ah, my honored young guests!" cried Don José, extending a hand to each in turn. "You have been enjoying an early stroll?"

"We tried to," was Dave Darrin's amiable reply, "but at a little distance from here a sentry halted us, and the officer of the guard explained that he had no orders to allow us to roam about at will."

"Ah, so?" inquired Don José gravely. "I shall look into that. Perhaps, better still, after breakfast, which is now ready, I will myself go with you about camp and insure your seeing whatever may interest you."

"That means that our liberty is gone," flashed through Darrin's mind in a twinkling. "Hereafter, we shall do exactly what Don José pleases — and nothing else!"

CHAPTER XVII

TEMPTER AND "TEMPTED"

AS far as external signs went, breakfast was a cheerful meal.

Dave and Dan, though seated near the chieftain, were not beside him. After the meal, however, Benedito approached the pair.

"Shall we go through the camp?" he inquired.

"It will give us pleasure," Dave assented.

"Then shall I give orders to have horses brought around?"

"It would be much pleasanter, may I suggest, General, if just we three go, and on foot," Dave suggested.

"You see, General, a naval officer rarely feels at home on the quarter deck of a horse," smiled Dan.

"As you wish, then," answered the rebel chieftain, amiably. "Gentlemen," to a group of his officers, "I shall be absent for an hour or two."

Pausing only long enough to light a cigar, Don José led the way to the grounds below, and started off with an American naval officer on each side of him.

"I have a map of the camp, prepared last evening by an engineer officer," the rebel chieftain began. "On our return I will show that to you. In the meantime we will look at the camp itself."

First of all Don José led his visitors to a park where six batteries of really excellent field-pieces were located. The guns were nearly new, but had been badly cared for by the artillerymen.

"What do you think of them?" Don José inquired.

"Fine pieces," Dave nodded, "but they might be better cleaned."

"I shall be delighted," glowed the rebel chieftain, "if you will instruct some of my men in the proper care of these pieces."

There being now no help for it, Dave went to work in earnest with the dozen men who answered Don José's signal to draw near.

"Hereafter, my excellent soldiers," said Benedito amiably, "you will be sure to keep the pieces in the condition that has been explained to you. I know the sun is hot, but that is no excuse for not having guns, on which our success may depend, kept in the best of condition."

All of the men saluted, the young lieutenant in charge of them also thanking the two American naval officers.

"Remember," called Don José, as he walked

away, "the field-pieces must be kept always in the best and cleanest condition."

Thence the chieftain led his visitors to the camp of an infantry regiment of some eight hundred men. Instantly, on an order from the general-in-chief, a battalion was called out under arms for a short, snappy drill, followed by an inspection of rifles and other equipment.

"Will you honor me by aiding in the inspection?" requested the ex-dictator.

There was no safe way of declining the invitation. Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell made an independent inspection, Benedito looking on hawk-eyed.

As they could not lie, Dave and Dan did not pronounce the men's equipment to be in anything like good order.

Many of the rifle-barrels were coated with traces of recent discharges. Often it was found that a rifle lock worked badly. The greatest need appeared to be for cleaning the pieces and keeping them well oiled. Calling for a cleaning kit and oil, and obtaining them after some delay, Ensign Darrin cleaned a rifle in a workmanlike way, then oiled it carefully.

"You have witnessed, Major?" Don José inquired of the battalion commander. "Hereafter you will see to it that every man in your battalion keeps his rifle in good order."

"It is to be regretted, my General, that we have not two such well-trained young officers for regular inspection duty with this army," suggested the major respectfully.

"Would it not be fine, even wonderful, if I were to persuade my young American friends to remain at least two or three weeks?" asked the ex-dictator, with a smile that did not wholly please Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell.

"If they do remain," returned the major, bowing, "I shall be delighted if they will pay me frequent visits."

From there the three trudged on through the forest to another regimental camp. Here Dave and Dan inspected and instructed a single company in the care of their rifles, as a matter of information for the rebel regiment's commanders.

"I wonder, gentlemen," inquired Don José, eagerly, as the three strolled away from that camp, "if I could not persuade you to throw up your commissions in your own country's service? You must be convinced, by this time, that I shall shortly be President of Vengara. If you will enter my service I will appoint each of you as brigadier generals, with all the pay and honors, and probably will employ you principally in inspection service and in the instruction of the artillery. What do you say — my generals?"

"It is a great honor," Dave bowed, "but you

will understand me, General, when I say that we have taken the oath of loyalty to the United States, and that we are bound to serve with the colors of our country during life or until our retirement."

"Pah!" scoffed the rebel chieftain. "Have you no ambition?"

"Only the ambition to serve loyally," Darrin replied.

"But see here, my young friends," urged Don José, "your government has made you only ensigns. Now my country, or I — for I *am* my country — will make you brigadier generals, with higher honors to come. General Darrin! General Dalzell!"

"Can you beat it?" grinned Dan, under his breath.

"But we are naval officers, not army men," Dave objected.

"Very good, then," argued Don José. "Vengara has some navy already. When I am in power we shall have more fighting ships. Let us say, then, that you will be Admiral Darrin and Admiral Dalzell?"

It was too much for Danny Grin, who blurted out:

"Two admirals, and with one tugboat to command between them!"

"You are wrong, my young friend!" frowned

Benedito. "Vengara, when I am in power, shall have a new and efficient navy, which will be all the more efficient if I am fortunate enough to have two ambitious young admirals with such recent training at Annapolis. Not even you, my young friend," Benedito frowned at Dan, "will have good cause to laugh at Vengara's navy when I am again at the head of the nation."

"I trust you will pardon my friend for laughing," begged Dave. "I can assure you that he appreciates the wealth that Vengara would possess under honest and capable government."

Don José bowed as low as though convinced he had been told that his *would* be an honest and capable rule.

"But will you not accept my offer, my young friends?" pursued the rebel chieftain when they had strolled a little further on.

"In the same breath, General," Dave rejoined, "we must voice our appreciation of the compliment and decline the offer. We are American officers, and it would be as impossible as it would be dishonorable for us to serve under any other flag than Old Glory!"

For once Dalzell forgot to grin. Halting at mention of the Flag, he reverently uncovered.

"I realize that I can neither convince nor persuade you," cried Don José Benedito, now in a tone of real regret. "Gentlemen, great as my

disappointment is, I am bound to respect your scruples. I will weary you with no more offers. Still, at any time, if you wish to open this conversation again, you may be sure of finding me a ready listener."

"Thank you, General Benedito," Dave replied, bowing. "And may I ask you what portions of your command lie beyond here?"

"None," answered the rebel chieftain.

"We are outside your lines?" demanded Dan.

"Yes."

"Wholly outside and beyond your lines?" Dave insisted.

"Wholly," smiled Don José. "I have left my nearest troops at least a quarter of a mile behind us."

"But surely you have outposts beyond here?" Darrin pressed.

"None that I know of," replied the rebel chieftain. "There may be scouting or raiding parties beyond here, and of course I have three small divisions of troops operating nearer La Choya. But we are outside the lines of my immediate command."

"General Benedito," declared Ensign Dan Dalzell, "to venture so far away from your troops — "

"But none of the federal troops have penetrated thus far," interposed Don José.

"General," murmured Dan, "you are indiscreet."

"I am never indiscreet," returned Don José, turning toward Dalzell.

"For once you have been, sir," spoke Dave Darrin briskly. "If you will glance down you will see what I am holding pointed at your side."

With indolent grace Don José pivoted on one heel. Then the expression of his face changed, for he beheld the barrel of Dave's revolver.

CHAPTER XVIII

TWO GENTLEMEN IN BAD COMPANY

"WHAT does this mean?" hissed Don José fiercely.

"Just what it would seem to mean, sir," Dave replied.

"Then —"

"You are our prisoner," Darrin responded calmly.

"For, as you will observe, I have a revolver also," Danny Grin added.

Slowly, as though trying to betray no alarm, Don José turned to gaze at Ensign Dalzell's steadily held automatic pistol.

"Pah! This is criminal folly!" scoffed Benedito. "What jest is this?"

"No jest at all, Don José," Dave returned calmly. "You are a prisoner of the United States forces, as represented by Ensign Dalzell and myself. You are just as surely our prisoner as though we had a ship's company at our backs. If you make any kind of effort to escape us, or if we encounter troops of yours who make any move to set you at liberty, we shall kill you, sir, just before meeting our own deaths. Are you convinced that I mean what I say, sir?"

"Yes," gasped Benedito. His lips now looked bluish; an ashen pallor struggled to show itself through the deep tan on his cheeks. "But am I not entitled to know why you have gone to such desperate lengths? Why should you desire to take me away from my army?"

"The United States does not favor your revolution," Dave went on.

"I know it," answered Don José, "but the United States is not at war with me."

"Nor would the United States have gone to this length unasked," Ensign Darrin continued. "Permission was granted to us at our own personal urgent request."

"What?" demanded Don José sharply. "Why should you two make a personal matter of my defeat?"

He Beheld the Barrel of Dave's Revolver.

"You imposed upon us at Colon," Dave went on accusingly, though his voice was mild. "You even won our gratitude by being of great service to us. It is now all but a proven fact, in my mind, that you engineered that assault upon Dalzell, and the near-accident with the automobile, merely that you might open up an avenue to our friendship and gratitude."

Don José laughed.

"You have as good as admitted the truth of my charge," Dave went on. "You posed as one Pasquale Gorgo, and even encountered us in a bank that the teller might identify you under that name, which he doubtless believed to be really yours. You knew, sir, that our ship, the 'Panama,' was to be ordered to the Vengaran coast to help other vessels of the American Navy to keep you from entering this country. In Colon you made our acquaintance and won our gratitude with the deliberate purpose of securing identification through us whereby you might obtain permission to pass through our lines when you landed in Vengara. And right easily and well did you put your deceitful trick through, sir!"

Again Don José laughed.

"You made fools of us, Benedito," Dave continued, now warming up, "and made us ridiculous in our own eyes and those of our friends.

Hence we conceived, and have put through, plans for taking you outside of your own camp and making you a prisoner of the United States."

"You have succeeded so far, yes," scoffed the rebel chieftain. "But this is only the first step of the way. You fools! Do you not realize that it will be impossible for you to take me through to the coast? Don't you know that you are bound to be stopped by my fighting men? You will keep me a prisoner? Pah! In one rash act you have thrown away your own lives!"

"I think it extremely probable, Benedito, that we shall lose our lives in this undertaking," Ensign Dave answered calmly. "We knew what the probabilities were before we started out on this enterprise. But, sir, we both shoot fast and shoot straight. If we run into any of your sympathizers who attempt to set you free, we shall shoot you dead instantly. We shall lose our own lives in return. Yet of one fact be sure — at the first sign of an attempt to rescue you, in that instant you die! Benedito, do you believe me?"

Straight back into the young ensign's eyes glared the ex-dictator.

"Yes," he admitted, without huskiness of voice, "I believe you. In return, I will ask you to believe me when I tell you that I much prefer to be shot to death, here and now, rather than

be turned over to the Rovistas, who would almost certainly torture me to death."

"We have no intention of turning you over to the Rovistas," Darrin assured the rebel chieftain. "Our purpose is to turn you over to the United States commander in the waters near here. I do not believe the United States government will do more than to order you deported to Europe. Now, Don José, I regret very much being obliged to do so, but I am going to take Dalzell's pistol and keep you thoroughly covered while my comrade 'goes through' you to take any weapons that you may have concealed upon your person."

His eyes flaming with rage, the ex-dictator held up both hands while Danny Grin made the inspection. The Vengaran proved to be unarmed.

"That is well," nodded Darrin. "Now we must be on our way at once. For greater security we must travel through the deepest portions of the forest. Don José, be good enough to walk beside Ensign Dalzell. I will bring up the rear, with my eyes ever on you."

Thrusting his own revolver inside his blouse, Danny Grin started along at the side of their prisoner.

"But you have no guide," murmured Benedito. "You will surely be lost in this forest."

"On the contrary, sir," Dave assured him,

"we have two excellent guides. Each of us carries a compass."

Though he permitted himself to be escorted as a prisoner, Don José Benedito gritted his teeth in rage. By and by, the chief of the rebellion became calmer.

"Gentlemen," he asked, "will you do me at least one favor? Should it appear that we are to be captured by Rovistas, will you give me your word of honor that you will kill me at once? For I have faith enough in the word of an American officer to know that he will keep his word religiously."

"I cannot promise that," Dave answered. "But I will promise that, in the event of your finding yourself about to fall into the hands of Rovistas, I will hand you a pistol with which you may defend yourself."

"I am content, then," murmured the ex-dictator. "Yet, let me inquire if you feel that you are really honorable gentlemen, when, having penetrated my camp, and having been treated like honored guests, you take advantage of the first opportunity for treachery, and serve me in this fashion."

"I think we might feel a bit disquieted about it," Dave answered, "though in any event and under any circumstances we would follow the orders of our lawful superiors. But you, yourself,

Don José, released us from the usual obligations of guests. After using us as your tools in securing safe and easy entry into this country, you further, in your camp, planned to use us again as your tools by causing us to send false information as to your military plans. You even went so far as to scheme to put us to torture, and even kill and bury us if we should refuse. So even you, Don José, must realize that we are quit of all the usual obligations of guests."

"What leads you to suppose that I had such plans?" Don José demanded.

"We don't have to guess. We actually know that you made such plans, sir," Dave assured the captive.

Don José looked his amazement.

"We cannot permit any more talking at present, sir," Dave broke in sharply. "If you are not more careful, you will attract the attention of your sympathizers — and then you will no longer be alive to threaten the peace and safety of Vengara. From now on — silence, sir!"

On they trod through the forest, Dave to the rear, directing the course by an occasional undertoned word to his comrade.

Presently Dan Dalzell, glancing sideways, caught glimpses of a peculiar smile playing over the features of Benedito.

"The scoundrel is thinking of something dis-

agreeable," murmured Danny Grin to himself. "Whatever it is he's thinking about, it doesn't bode any good to us."

For fully two hours the trio kept steadily on. So far there had not been a sign of a rebel soldier, or, indeed, of any other passer-by in these deep woods.

"I wonder how long it will be before your staff officers take alarm at your absence?" suggested Dave when, at last, they halted and stood wiping away the perspiration that the brisk journey had brought out.

"It won't be very long," the rebel chieftain replied, smiling disagreeably. "And then —"

"And then, if they overhaul us, the rebellion against President Rova will end for lack of a real leader," Darrin finished for him dryly.

"My officers would not be clumsy enough to rush in to rescue me," predicted Don José. "When they locate me you will not know it. Barefooted sharpshooters will be sent ahead in your path. The first sign that even I will have of rescue will be when shots ring out and you two drop dead at the fire from ambush."

"Just like that, eh?" smiled Ensign Dave, betraying not the least uneasiness. "Death of that sort will come without warning, and painlessly, won't it, Don José?"

"It will," affirmed Don José savagely.

"But if your sharpshooters should miss, and either one of us should live for two seconds more, you will be certain to cross the River of Death with us, sir."

"When my sharpshooters aim for you there will be little danger of their missing you on the first fire," Benedito declared. "True, my young friends, there will be a chance or two on both sides. I have in mind a bargain to offer you. Release me, now, and I will return to my camp. In that case I will pledge my word not to send any party in pursuit of you. More, I will now write a pass that will take you both through the lines of any troops of mine that you may encounter on the way to the coast. In that way you will both be sure of escaping with your lives."

"What assurance would we have of our safety being respected?" asked Dave, promptly.

"My word of honor," asserted Benedito, calmly.

"Do you imagine that we would accept your word as guarantee for a promise of any kind whatever, sir?"

"Would you not?" demanded Benedito, wonderingly.

"Not after the way you have already deceived us, lied to us, and plotted to make us again your tools in the infamous conspiracy to seize the government of Vengara," replied Dave sternly.

"Then you are running yourselves into certain death!" warned the ex-dictator.

"I may as well take you into my confidence, Don José, and admit to you that we have pledged ourselves to bring you back a prisoner. Under the circumstances we would much prefer dying to going back to our ship with our pledge not kept."

"Then you —" broke in Benedito angrily.

"As I did myself the honor of informing you before, sir, that either we are going to take you through to our ship, a prisoner, or we are going to die cheerfully in the effort."

"You are fools, then!" exclaimed the rebel chieftain angrily.

"As fools of that sort, we shall live or die, as Fate decrees, sir," smiled Darrin. "And now it is time for us to resume our march. For a change, Dan, suppose you walk behind while I remain at our guest's side."

In that order the march was taken up. From now on Don José remained sullen, distant, making no effort to converse. Even the sardonic smile had left his face, which remained as black as a thundercloud.

For another hour the trio plodded on. Dave remembered that they had no food supplies, nor in this forest were they likely to obtain any food worthy of the name.

"But I reckon we can march on empty stomachs until we reach the ship," he told himself.

Dan, who now held the compass, called the directions from time to time.

Suddenly drawing the revolver from his blouse and holding it in his right hand, Darrin gripped his prisoner's nearer arm with his left hand.

"Halt!" he whispered. "I think I hear voices."

"Undoubtedly," murmured Don José. "It is high time that we encountered some of my men."

"Remember the warning that I have given you," whispered the young ensign. "Any sign from you, and you die!"

"That would be murder!" protested Don José, a change in his expression appearing.

"No; it would be the carrying out of military orders, and we are officers in the service of our country," Dave answered. "With our orders we can have no concern beyond carrying them out. So be careful, Don José, that you act and speak just as you know we would have you do. Otherwise, two revolvers will speak your doom!"

With that Darrin thrust his weapon back inside his blouse, not an instant too soon, for in front of him a twig crackled. Then an officer and several rebel soldiers stepped into view.

As for Don José, what did that ugly smile on his face portend?

CHAPTER XIX

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN

"THE general-in-chief!"

That astonished cry burst from the lips of the rebel captain, as he halted, staring wide-eyed.

Then, a bit tardily, the rebel officer brought his hand to the rim of his cap in salute.

Still smiling, Don José brought his own hand up in return of the salute. Dave and Dan also saluted the captain briskly, then dropped their right hands so that they might swiftly reach for the convenient butts of their automatic revolvers.

Behind the several soldiers appeared at least a score of their comrades. Probably there were many others too far back to be seen by Dave and Dan.

"We did not expect to find you so far from camp, my general," murmured the captain.

"I am taking a little stroll," replied Don José, smiling composedly.

"Whatever my general says is the truth," murmured the captain.

"And why should it not be?" laughed Dave.

"Of course, excellency," replied the captain, saluting Darrin directly.

Then came an awkward pause. The Americans and their captive could hardly press on through the halted column.

It was Dave who spoke, in English in a low tone, demanding:

"Is your officer going to take his men out of the way, sir, or is our walk at an end?"

Low-uttered as the words were, Don José did not have to guess to find their real meaning.

Forcing a laugh to his lips, the rebel chieftain asked:

"Are you satisfied, Captain, that my presence in the forest is proper? And, if so, are you going to oblique your line so that we may pass on?"

"A million pardons, my General!" begged the humiliated captain. "I shall at once take my men out of your excellency's august path. May I ask, my General, if I am to report having seen you here, or am I to hold my tongue?"

"You may do what pleases you, my excellent Captain," smiled Don José, waving his hand.

Ceremoniously saluting, the captain next spoke to his men, marching them off at an oblique.

"Forward, sir!" Dave whispered, and the trio moved onward.

It was not until five minutes later that Darrin remarked:

"And now, Don José, you figure that your captain, whose suspicions very likely were aroused, will make haste to turn in a report, and that soon these forests will be alive with searching parties."

"I am much afraid that it will be so," smiled the rebel chieftain.

"Dan!" spoke Dave, sharply.

"Yes, chum!"

"Instead of being ready to shoot our friend on a second's notice, be prepared to do so in a fifth of a second — at need!"

"Trust me!" growled Danny Grin.

"You are bloodthirsty wretches," mocked Don José.

"And we have proof that you believe that," retorted Darrin.

"What proof?"

"If you had not believed it, you would have ordered your captain to seize us."

"You are taunting me with cowardice," scowled Benedito.

"Not so," Dave Darrin retorted. "I do not believe you are a coward. In fact, I am certain that you are not. But you are a half-way fatalist. If you resist us now you are certain that we will keep our word and kill you as an escaping prisoner. By waiting and biding your time you hope to be rescued alive. Perhaps you do not object to dying, as a last resort, but you would

much rather live, rejoin your army and triumph with your revolution."

"You are a very wonderful young man, and have a great knowledge of human nature," grimaced Don José sneeringly.

"At all events, I would have you know that you are acquitted of any charge of cowardice," Dave replied courteously.

"I cannot help thinking," Don José continued, "what a foolish pair of young men you are. Even now, after the serious affront you have offered me, I am willing, yes, eager, to renew my offer of high rank for each of you in my service. And, if you accept, I will pledge myself, by any oath you require, that each shall have full opportunity to make his fortune within three years. Come, can you decline rank, power and wealth, which are nearly all that most men long for?"

"You said well when you used the words 'nearly all,'" Ensign Dave answered. "Rank, wealth and power are among the great objects in life, but, with one bred to the service, honor is even more precious. So, to spare you, sir, the humiliation of more refusals, I will tell you that Ensign Dalzell and I value honor more highly than all the lures of life."

"Then you are foolish, both of you!" snorted the captive, disgustedly.

"Dan," spoke Dave, suddenly, as the trio

stopped at the edge of more open country, "do you see that tree, the one with the blasted trunk, about a third of a mile from here?"

"Of course," nodded Dalzell.

"Then I wish you would step up beside Don José, and watch him with all the sharpness of a cat. Keep in the cover of the woods by going to the left. But don't go into the open, where you might be seen from a distance. When you reach shelter near that blasted tree, halt, and keep on watching your prisoner!"

"Then you're going to leave us?" Danny Grin inquired wonderingly.

"For a brief time, yes."

"I won't lose the prisoner, unless by the gun route," said Ensign Dan significantly.

Stepping to the left, Darrin vanished noiselessly behind a screen of bushes.

Dan, one hand on the butt of his revolver, ordered Benedito to move on just ahead of him.

Dave's purpose was simple enough. He went back, keeping close to the trail by which they had come, yet not showing himself directly on it. After twenty minutes of careful scouting, Darrin turned back, keeping on until he had come once more in sight of the tree with the blasted trunk. From that point he went on to the left, following the same course which he had instructed Dalzell to take.

As Ensign Dave cautiously approached the blasted tree he heard a cautious whistle not more than twenty feet away.

"Here," whispered Dan, upon which Dave went straight to the jungle that now concealed his chum and the captive chieftain.

"Well?" demanded Don José, with a tantalizing smile.

"I have no objection to telling you the reason for my absence," Ensign Darrin responded. "I went back over the trail to see whether any of the men under the captain whom we met a while ago were following us."

"Well?" again demanded Benedito, without a flicker of a smile this time.

"None of the captain's men are following us," Dave answered composedly.

"How do you know?" — this with a sneer.

"Because I would have seen any trailers working along the route by which we came," was Dave's rejoinder. "An American soldier, on such a trail, would mark the way for others to follow by leaving small bits of paper scattered along the course of his route."

"Few of my poor soldiers either read or write, and hence do not usually have paper with them," remarked Don José.

"Leaves torn to small bits would mark a trail almost as well," Darrin smiled.

Don José Benedito frowned, then looked wistful as he remarked:

"None of my poor soldiers would think of that fashion of marking a trail. You Americans are really wonderfully clever."

"Because our American soldiers are men of considerable education," Darrin went on. "Men like yourself, when in power in Vengara, should see to it that your commonest people are given good educations."

"The thought is worthless," smiled the ex-dictator. "Educate our poor people of Vengara, and they would know too much to tolerate the kind of government that we give them. Frequent revolutions flourish only in lands where the people are too ignorant to understand what goes on in the outside world. Educate our people, and in nine elections out of ten they would actually *choose* their own rulers."

"Education would be a splendid thing for that very reason!" cried Dave. "Why shouldn't people choose their own rulers? Why should you use the forms of free government, and pretend to head a free people, when actually you impose upon their ignorance to rule them as you will? But perhaps there is still more in your opposition to educating your common people. If you educated them sufficiently they would realize that war is not glorious, but merely wasteful.

They would understand that all wars, save those forced upon a people, are wicked. Then when a pretender to power came along and called these poor *peons* to arms they would not respond. These revolutions, these civil wars, would then become impossible."

"Most of the people of Europe are well educated," sneered Benedito. "Has that fact kept *them* out of war? Are not hundreds of thousands of armed Europeans now engaged in killing each other?"

"*Millions* of them are so engaged in Europe to-day," Dave confessed sadly.

"Then what does education accomplish in keeping people out of war?" Benedito demanded, triumphantly. "Educate the *peon* and he would not fight less, but he would not be willing to work."

"Children are compelled to go to school in my country," Darrin returned. "Yet, when they grow up, they are much more industrious than the working people of Vengara."

Again the march was taken up. But this time Darrin resolved to strike off at right angles, going a full mile to the northward before again turning and heading straight for the coast.

"You are lacking in one thing," complained Benedito, at last.

"What is that?" Dave asked.

"Your commissary is weak. You have no food, and I am actually famished."

"We will mend that as soon as may be," Ensign Darrin smilingly promised.

Ten minutes later they came upon a narrow brook where the water ran over stones.

"This water looks clean and cool," remarked Dave. "Down on your knees, Don José, and drink your fill. A stomach full of water does not trouble one as much as a stomach empty of everything."

With a grimace Benedito followed the suggestion. Dan next took a drink, then arose to watch the captive while Ensign Darrin knelt for a drink.

With his head close to the ground, Dave suddenly extended himself, lying at full length with one ear pressed against the soil for a minute or more.

"What's up?" inquired Danny Grin, instantly all attention.

"I'm listening," Dave explained.

"You hear something?"

"Yes."

Dan waited in absolute silence until Darrin straightened up, remarking:

"You may try your ear, Dan. I may be wrong, but to me it sounds like the approach of a body of cavalry."

As soon as Dave was on his feet, Danny Grin dropped to earth.

It was in that brief instant that Don José Benedito wheeled like a flash, making a great leap for liberty.

CHAPTER XX

A NEW START AND A HALT

ALERT as a tiger watching its prey, Dave Darrin sprang after the fugitive, clutching at his collar and throwing the rebel chieftain to the ground.

As he did so, Darrin rolled his prisoner over on his back, and jammed a knee into his chest.

Don José opened his mouth to speak. In that instant the muzzle of Ensign Dave's automatic revolver was thrust between the teeth, a wedge that effectually prevented the closing of the mouth.

"One untoward act on your part, sir," warned Dave coolly, "will result in my pressing the trigger. I have an idea that the explosion would blow off the top of your head."

Panting, Don José extended his arms limply on the ground at right angles to his body.

Dan Dalzell, after one startled glance upward, placed his ear once more to the ground.

"You are quite right, Dave," announced the other young ensign. "Cavalry are coming this way. Want any help with our friend?"

"Yes," nodded Darrin.

When Dan reached them Dave commanded:

"Draw your revolver, Dan, and march with it pressed against the small of this man's back."

As he spoke Dave drew the rebel chieftain to his feet.

"Are you now prepared, sir, to behave yourself?" Darrin inquired.

"I find myself unable to offer any promises," was the rebel chieftain's retort.

"We could hardly give much credence to your promises, anyway," Darrin rejoined. "To the left, sir! I believe that the jungle yonder will offer us as good a hiding place as may be found on short notice."

At a depth of three feet in the jungle a human being would have been invisible to a passer-by. Dave, however, conducted the prisoner some twenty feet into the dense thicket before he permitted a halt.

"Now," proposed the young ensign, "we will halt here and remain silent. Dan, keep the muzzle of your weapon placed against the back of our friend."

Nearer came the tread of horses' feet. Then still nearer, until it really seemed as if the troop must be headed for the very thicket in which the young American officers held their prisoner.

Dave glanced at Dan with a look that asked:

"Do you suppose the troopers have any real trailers leading them?"

"I don't know; I wish I did," was what Dalzell's eyes telegraphed back.

With his felt sombrero off, lest a glimpse of its cloth attract attention, Dave contrived to screen his head to the best advantage as he tried to peer through the thicket. Dan centered his whole regard on the short, stocky frame of José Benedito, keeping the muzzle of his automatic revolver pressed against the small of the rebel chieftain's back.

Into sight, riding at a rapid trot, came a troop of at least forty horsemen. A grizzled old captain rode at their head, with a younger lieutenant on either side of him. This body of horsemen, officers with eyes turned toward the ground, rode at a brisk trot despite the bushes and the uneven ground. They passed the jungle some sixty yards away.

Dave heaved a sigh of relief as the party passed, plainly without having observed signs of their presence.

The troop passed on out of sight. Just as the

sounds of the hoofs of the horses of this party were dying out, the sound of another cavalry troop was heard approaching.

Into sight came three horsemen. At first glance Dave Darrin felt himself filled with apprehension.

"These men are *real* scouts, and riding as a rear flanking party," he told himself. "They study the ground like veterans. Are they going to find us?"

Trembling slightly with excitement, Dave Darrin gripped his automatic pistol more tightly. Dan kept both his gaze and his weapon unalterably fixed on Don José Benedito, who, also, began to tremble with eagerness.

Just in front of the jungle one of the horsemen uttered a cry. Reining in sharply he leaped to the ground and picked up a handkerchief.

In the same instant both young naval officers felt for their own handkerchiefs. Neither had lost one. Had Benedito, then, managed, unobserved, to leave such a clue in the open?

Briefly, eagerly, the three horsemen examined what had been found. Then another man sprang to the ground, the two now dismounted passing their bridles to the man still in saddle.

"This is important," muttered the finder of the fabric to his companions. "We must hunt here for any trace that may help us."

Don José Benedito trembled from head to foot, but he did not call out nor attempt to attract the attention of the men.

After a brief conference, which did not reach the ears of the listeners in the jungle, the two dismounted scouts hastened on, leaving their third comrade in his saddle, holding the bridles of the horses thus left in his care.

Two minutes passed. Then Dave turned to telegraph to Dan in a swift glance:

"Watch Benedito for your life, and trust the rest to me."

Receiving Dalzell's nod in answer, Dave stepped stealthily forward.

Three minutes later Darrin thrust his right hand through the leaves at the edge of the jungle, whispering hoarsely in Spanish:

"Make a single sound, and you can guess what will happen to you, my trooper!"

The astounded horseman turned in his saddle to find himself glancing down the well-oiled barrel of an automatic revolver that looked to him, just then, as big as a field-piece of artillery.

No coward, the trooper reached for his revolver. But Darrin, alert, snatched it from the holster and put in his pocket.

"That trick should have cost you your life, my friend," remarked Dave, in a cold, steady tone. "Now, down out of saddle with you, and

not a sound or a move of any other sort, if you want to live!"

Though he glared and his breath came fast, the trooper, after flashing looks of hatred at the intrepid young ensign, obeyed.

Dave, after commanding the trooper to hand over all three of the bridles, added:

"Now, get away from here as fast as your feet will carry you! And do not open your mouth unless you wish me to ride after you and shoot you!"

Once he was sure of permission to leave, the trooper fled, though twice, before he vanished, he shot a menacing look backward over his shoulder. In not a few armies it is an old trick to tell a prisoner to make his escape, and then shoot him in the back for doing so.

"Dan," whispered Dave, hoarsely, "bring your man out here — on the jump!"

"He's balky!" came Dalzell's hoarse whisper.

"Then shoot him dead where he stands, and join me," advised Darrin, knowing full well that his chum would do no such thing to a helpless man.

Don José promptly changed his mind. Though he scowled blackly, he stepped briskly through the jungle.

"Give Don José a hand, and help him up into one of the saddles, please," Darrin directed.

Dan accomplished that feat in a twinkling.

To each saddle was hung a coil of cowhide rope. With this Dalzell lashed the rebel chieftain securely to his horse.

Dave was already in saddle. Dan followed quickly just as hoofbeats sounded in the distance.

"Take the bridle of Don José's mount and ride fast. Turn to the left as soon as this bit of jungle is passed," Darrin ordered. "I'll bring up the rear."

Thus they got away and were out of sight just as three horsemen, on two horses, reached the jungle. These men were the former riders of the beasts now seized for the service of the United States.

Dave's object in riding to the northward was to escape the scouting party ahead, which might double on its tracks at any moment. For at least two miles he kept on the same course. The horses traveled at a quick trot.

"Halt!" cried Darrin, at last, and Dan reined in both the animals ahead.

"We'll do better now, I believe, to give the horses a minute for breathing and then start for the coast," Darrin announced.

With that he dismounted, and, still holding his bridle, listened with his ear at the ground.

"I don't hear any sound of pursuit," he announced. "We'll alter the course and keep on."

Three times, that afternoon, the young naval officers heard sounds of moving cavalry in the distance, but each time they avoided an encounter.

Just before dark they came upon a little house which stood in the center of a clearing of perhaps two acres, situated in the heart of the forest.

Leaving Dan and the captive behind, and keeping his revolver where he could seize it instantly, Darrin rode ahead to investigate. The house, a little, three-room affair, with a thatch roof, and thatch mats for windows in case of storm, proved to be untenanted.

Not far from the house was a low shed. In this, when Dan and Benedito rode forward at Dave's signal, the horses were tied. Hay and grain were found there, with which the horses were liberally fed.

"I hope we'll find that the owner has been equally thoughtful in provisioning the house," muttered Dalzell. "To-night I'm so hungry that I'd chew anything even though as tough as shoe-leather."

Before they entered the house, both young officers drew their revolvers. Back in the woods Darrin had tossed away the pistol he had taken from the trooper.

The house showed no signs of occupancy. Nor was there much of anything there. In a cupboard Dan found a few packages of soda bis-

cuit, which, on opening, proved to be fresh enough for eating. There was not a bed or a blanket, while the nearest thing to a chair was an old stool.

In a closet was found a Rovista uniform and a sombrero.

"Perhaps that tells the tale," smiled Dave. "The owner may have been drafted into the Rovista army. He may have deserted Rova, reached his former home, taken his horse and ridden to safety."

"Or joined the Beneditistas," suggested Dan, glancing at their captive.

"We can eat, at any rate," murmured Darrin. "Then we'll try to snatch a few hours' sleep here. It will hardly be safe to show a light here to-night, for there are plenty of rebels in these woods, and there may be a few regiments of Rovistas within a few miles, for we seem to be in a belt of territory disputed by both federals and rebels."

As many of the soda biscuit as could be eaten were munched before dark came on. Don José Benedito ate but little and munched his food sullenly.

The meal over, Dave slipped out to the shed to see that the horses were safe. He returned, bringing the rawhide coils.

"Don José," he said, "I am afraid we are going

to give you reason to call us discourteous, but safety must always be considered first. Therefore we must both bind and gag you before we lie down."

"It is an insult to gag me!" fumed the ex-dictator.

"And an insult that I much regret inflicting," Dave answered, calmly, "but I must not fail to take every care that nothing may occur which might imperil the success of our enterprise. Be good enough to submit."

There were still a few rays of daylight coming into the hut when the three lay down upon the floor to sleep. Don José, securely gagged, lay on his back between the two young naval officers. His hands and feet were lashed, while lines of rawhide bound him also to the ensign on either side of him.

"If you move toward Dalzell, you'll wake me," Dave explained. "If you try to reach me you'll disturb Dalzell. If it should be possible for you to rise to your feet you'd wake us both. Good night, Don José Benedito, and may you sleep as well as the circumstances permit."

Despite the hardness of the floor, for a few hours the three slept well enough. Then a noise in the distance caused Dave to open his eyes. Next he sat up.

"Dan," he called, softly, "do you hear that?"

"Eh?" muttered Dalzell, drowsily. Then he, too, sat up.

"Firing!" breathed Dan.

"Yes, and it's more than a skirmish," Dave went on. "Dan, we're close to the battle line. The direction of the sound shows that we're still inside the rebel lines."

"I hadn't a doubt that we were," Dalzell returned nonchalantly.

Don José was already awake. Dave removed the lashings that bound him, but did not deem it prudent to take out the gag.

Within ten minutes the firing sounded nearer.

"Wow!" ejaculated Ensign Dave Darrin. "Dan, it must be the rebels who are being driven back. A few minutes more, and this clearing may be full of them. Then we shall find ourselves in a pretty kettle of fish!"

"If you'll watch after our friend —" proposed Dalzell.

Boom! It was a field-piece, and the flash showed the gun to be just south of the clearing.

CHAPTER XXI

IN A SALT-WATER PICKLE

"INSTEAD of walking to the stable I'll run!" gasped Ensign Dalzell.

Boom! Another field-piece was fired, and then a third. There could be no doubt that a battery was posted in the neighborhood.

Standing by one of the windows Dave could hear the whistle of bullets in the air outside.

"The house may be riddled at any moment," Dave whispered to the captive. "Permit me to assist you to lie down; you will be safer that way."

With the captive stretched on the floor, Dave returned to the window. He discovered that the battery consisted of four pieces. Of the battery he could see nothing but the flashes of the pieces.

"Here are the horses," announced Dan, calmly, from the doorway.

At that moment rattling volleys of rifle fire snapped out from the line of the battery.

"The fight is coming nearer," declared Dave, stepping over to the doorway. "The infantry support of the artillery has now gone into action."

Past the young officers the bullets of the attacking force whistled as they stood and listened.

Then, from a distance of a quarter of a mile arose an eager battle yell. The firing of the field-pieces was fast and furious, while the din of the firing of the infantry support came crashingly to the ears of the American listeners.

Suddenly both cannon and rifle fire died out to the south of the clearing.

"Hoofs and wheels!" exclaimed Darrin. "Hear 'em? Don José, for once your soldiers have been overwhelmed, and are fleeing!"

Onward, with yells, came the attackers. Firing was not so frequent, though now and then volleys ripped out.

"The scene has shifted," declared Dave, musingly. "At last I believe we're out of reach of the rebels. But Don José must not be found here and recognized by Rovista soldiers! Dan, make it your business to watch our captive. I'm going to free him."

Swiftly Dave unknotted the rawhide.

"That uniform of a rebel general-in-chief won't become you, with the Rovistas in possession of this part of the forest," Dave declared. "Don José, permit me to assist you to the closet yonder. There you will find the uniform of a federal private. I am sorry, but you'll have to leave your shoes behind. Federal privates don't

wear footgear. As this house may be visited at any moment, I'd advise you to use all haste in changing uniforms."

While Benedito made the change, Dave, standing outside, kept guard.

"I have changed," growled Don José, at last.

"Is your footgear off?"

"Yes."

"Then, pardon me, but I am going to have a look at you."

Stepping inside the closet and shutting the door, while Dan stood just outside, Dave struck a match.

"Be good enough to put on the sombrero, too," Darrin urged. Don José complied.

"Despite your humble attire I am afraid you are still in danger of being recognized," Darrin went on. "I don't believe you care about having any Rovista officer know you."

"Naturally not," admitted Benedito grimly.

"Then remain where you are, and Dalzell will guard you."

Stepping outside, working in the dark, Dave managed to cut away some portions of his own shirt.

With this and a handkerchief Dave returned to the closet, leaving Dan outside.

"Now, while the door is closed, sir," the young ensign explained, "I must ask you, Don José, to

be good enough to take this box of matches and keep me supplied with light."

With the aid of this illumination, Darrin took off his blouse, dropping it to the floor, then rolled up a sleeve, baring his arm. Next, with the sharp point of his knife, the young ensign made a few scratches on his own arm, breaking the surface of the skin and letting out blood. This he smeared on part of the linen. Next he bound Don José's head so that the latter's face was partially concealed, one eye being wholly so. The bloodstained linen was used to make the outside of the bandage. By this time the scratches on Darrin's arm had dried. After a further glance at Don José Dave picked up and drew on his blouse.

"Come in, Dan," he called softly. As soon as his chum was with him Dave shoved the door shut, than struck a match, holding it up.

"Do you think any one would know Don José now?" he asked.

"I hardly know him myself," Dan chuckled. "That bandage is a good disguise, and the red stuff makes it look very real. Where did you get that red stuff?"

"From my arm," Dave nodded.

"It is not every one who would draw his own blood to save a prisoner," murmured Don José, a near approach to gratitude in his tone.

"It didn't hurt me any," Dave rejoined. "Even if it hurt I would do all in my power to protect a prisoner to whom my honor is pledged."

"You might have drawn the blood from *my* arm," suggested Benedito.

"I didn't know whether it would hurt," Dave smiled, as he blew out a match and dropped the charred stick to the closet floor. "Until I did know I didn't care to experiment on any one else. And now, Don José, I think we will move. Are you willing to be our guide?"

"I do not understand you," declared the rebel chieftain.

"Nevertheless, sir, be good enough to answer me. Will you consent to be our guide?"

"Since I must say something, I will say 'yes.'"

"Good!" chuckled Dave. "You are our guide, then, and we will call you Pedro."

"Humph!" grinned Dan Dalzell. "It is a patient gentleman who will consent to be named after a game of cards."

Firing broke out again, though at some distance.

"It sounds as if your troops were being driven inland," suggested Darrin, in a low voice as the three stepped from the closet.

"Then it is Escorbada's brigade that is retreating," growled the rebel leader. "He is the only stupid general I have, but I had to appoint him, for he is a man of much influence in Vengara."

"Come," called Dave, "we must mount and get nearer the coast while we have the chance. General Escorbada may be reinforced by some other commander who possesses more military skill."

Don José Benedito was assisted in mounting. He was not tied to the saddle this time, for, now that he was within the federal lines, he was not likely to attempt a dash for freedom in the dark.

Quickly the little party rode to the eastward. They had gone barely more than half a mile when a sentry's challenge halted them.

Dave rode forward and stated that he was traveling under a pass from General Panfilo. An officer of the guard was called, who, by the aid of a lantern, inspected the pass. He looked over the three travelers, then said:

"Pass, on gentlemen, and your guide with you."

"Lead the way, Pedro," called Dave, after thanking the officer.

Three times more, before daylight, the travelers were halted, but none of the Rovistas appeared to doubt the genuineness of Don José as a federal trooper.

Soon after daylight Dave and Dan came upon a regimental camp. Here Dave and Dan were invited to breakfast with a party of officers, while "Pedro" was sent off to eat with the common soldiers.

"I don't think we'll have to worry about him here," whispered Dave. "Don José will know better than to take to the tall timber, now, where he would be almost certain to be picked up by one Rovista party or another. Since he knows that we don't intend to turn him over to the Rovistas, he can be depended upon to stick to us for his own sake."

None the less Dalzell was glad to observe that, from where he sat on a campstool, he could keep an eye over the man who had stirred up all the trouble in battle-torn Vengara.

"You defeated the rebels last night?" Dave asked one of the younger of the federal officers.

"The rebels haven't stopped running yet," laughed the Vengaran addressed.

"How is that known?" asked Dalzell politely. "Are the rebels being pursued?"

"They were chased some miles," came the answer. "To-day, I expect we shall move forward and probably engage the rascals again before dark."

"If you will remain, and go with us, Señor Ensign, I will promise you some pretty sights," spoke up a federal major.

"I would greatly like to do so, if we were free," Dave responded. "However, we have our own duties that engage all our attention."

"Have you ever seen fighting?" asked another officer.

"In Mexico," Dave replied. "Mr. Dalzell and I had a very small hand in the taking of Vera Cruz."

"If you could secure General Panfilo's permission to spend a fortnight with our brave men!" exclaimed a captain.

"I wish that we might," Dave nodded.

"But there is one feature of your Vengara fighting that we do not like," put in Danny Grin.

"And what is that?"

"Your little habit of shooting prisoners of war."

"Isn't that done in your country?" demanded the same officer.

"The officer in the service of the United States, who ordered prisoners of war shot, unless trying to escape, would be tried on a charge of murder," Dan rejoined, with emphasis.

"Then perhaps you hang your prisoners of war?" suggested another Vengaran captain.

"We do not," returned Dalzell. "We treat prisoners as prisoners, and that is all that we are allowed to do. Prisoners of war are entitled to the same care that we give to our own fighting men."

"That is very strange," murmured the major. "But then, your country is rich. You can afford to feed your prisoners, and you have so many soldiers that you can spare some of your men to

guard them. In Vengara we must make every soldier count when there is fighting."

Far away a bugle blew. The note was taken up and came nearer, until one of the buglers near by blew a furious, yet musical blast.

"It is the call to be ready to fall in," explained one of the officers, springing up.

"Then we must take leave of you," said Ensign Dave, extending his hand. "After that we will get our horses."

"Let your guide, Pedro, do that," replied the officer. Making a trumpet of his hands, the speaker called to Don José, sharply ordering him to bring around the gentlemen's horses without delay.

Nor was there any help for it. Doubtless boiling with rage that he did not dare show, the haughty, but disguised, Don José led up the horses.

"Dog!" cried a captain, turning angrily upon the pretended Pedro. "Know you not enough to salute foreign officers when you approach them? Would you bring disgrace upon the army of Vengara by giving these gentlemen to believe that our men are but an army of unmannerly dogs? Stupid, I will have you placed in the ranks of my company, and detail a better soldier to act as guide to these American gentlemen!"

Though he tried to subdue it, there was a flash-

ing look of pleasure in Don José's eyes at the thought. If he could but march out to battle with these Rovistas, it would be a dull day if he could not find opportunity to desert to his own forces.

"I beg that you will do nothing of the sort, Captain," urged Dave, politely. "The truth is that we are much interested in this fellow, Pedro. I trust that you will permit him to go on with us."

"Very good, then, sir," replied the captain. "There sounds the call to fall in. *Adios, caballeros.*"

Left behind, Dave, Dan and their prisoner mounted. So rapidly did they push forward to the coast that, of the battle of that day, they heard only the distant rumblings of artillery.

But these young naval officers were at the threshold of trouble more than sufficient to turn some men's hair gray.

Thrice, that day, Dave and his party were halted. To the rear of its fighting line the Vengaran army kept good guard over its line of communication.

Usually, the sight of American uniforms and a look at Pedro's federal uniform and his bound-up head were enough to secure the passage of the trio without challenge.

Less than an hour before dark, Dave, Dan and Don José reached the seashore. They had come

out many miles above La Choya. Indeed, there was not even a house near at hand.

"What now?" asked Dan, as they reined in their horses less than fifty yards from the water's edge.

Dave's glance swept the sea. Not a sail was in sight. Off on the horizon appeared the smoke of some distant steam craft.

But there, to the northeast, over in a little bay, they saw the mast of a small craft.

"Perhaps we can hire that craft and a boatman to bring her back," Darrin suggested.

"I'll go and see," Danny Grin offered.

"If you'll be good enough," Dave urged.

Dan started his horse into a slow canter. The poor brute had done hard service this day, yet, after the brief breathing spell, was able to show some speed and spirit.

After a few moments Dan was out of sight. Then followed a period of waiting that was not as long as it seemed.

"We're going to get the boat," spoke Darrin to Don José, after a while. "See, her mainsail is going up."

The watchers were able to follow the course of the craft as she now stood out on the little bay. Then she rounded the small head. In the stern, at the tiller, Dalzell stood up and waved one hand.

"Why, my friend appears to be all alone in the boat," Dave went on.

The boat was a small sloop, without cabin, and looked hardly seaworthy.

"I left a note in Spanish — thrust it under the door of an old hut on the shore," Dan called, as he ran the boat in close to the beach. "I told the owner of the empty cabin, in that note, that the horse I left tied alongside belonged to the rebels, and that, if the Rovistas won, he might keep the horse as pay for this craft in case he never saw his boat again. I reckon a good saddle horse more than pays for a sailboat like this, doesn't it?"

"It ought to pay for three boats like this one," laughed Dave. "And now we must leave two more saddle horses to be appropriated by the finders. Pedro, will you perform your final service as a guide, and unbridle and unsaddle these horses and turn 'em loose to graze?"

Though he scowled, Don José Benedito did as requested.

"And now, sir," commanded Dave, with a flourish of his automatic revolver, "I must require you, Don José, to wade out to the boat and get aboard."

Though he did not have to go in the water above his knees, Benedito plainly disliked the performance. Keeping close behind him, Dar-

rin followed into the water, and soon both were aboard the little craft.

"And now where, Captain?" asked Dan, with a grinning salute.

"La Choya, I suppose," Dave pondered. "Yes; let it go at that. The 'Panama' ought to be somewhere near that port."

"You do not suppose, do you," hinted Don José, "that yonder trail of smoke comes from your battleship?"

"Not the least chance," Darrin replied. "The craft out yonder must be a single stacker. The 'Panama' has three funnels."

"For La Choya, then," observed Danny Grin, hauling in on the sheet and throwing the tiller over.

For nearly a mile Dan sailed straight out into the open, then turned southward, headed in the direction of La Choya.

The sun was now near the western horizon. It was about to sink, and then, after a twilight of perhaps twenty minutes, the darkness of night would overtake the voyagers.

The spars of an approaching steamer were now visible. Just after the sun went down Dave pointed across the water.

"There's the hull of a steamship showing," he called, and Dan nodded. Dave unslung his glass and looked intently.

"Jove," he muttered, "she's no freighter."

"A liner, then?" asked Dan, keeping his gaze on his course.

"Nothing like it," answered Dave, after a few moments, his eyes still at his glasses. "Tell you what I think she is, Dan. She looks like a small cruiser."

"An American?" Dalzell persisted.

"No; she isn't. I'm trying to pick up her flag, but it flies so low that I can't make out what it is."

Two minutes later Dave called out, his voice shaking:

"It's the red, white, yellow and blue flag of Vengara! Don José, do you know that craft?"

"I cannot make her out well enough with the naked eye," replied the ex-dictator.

"Pardon me, sir," said Dave, promptly, and passed the glass.

"She's the 'Zapata,' of the Vengaran Navy," announced the dictator calmly.

"One of the Rovista cruisers?" asked Darrin, in dismay.

"Yes," nodded Don José, and passed back the glasses.

"This is awful!" gasped Dave, going white around the lips.

"Have no fear," sneered Don José. "You two are American officers, and you carry me as

a prisoner. You will receive a decided welcome aboard the 'Zapata.'"

"But they'll also get you," gasped Darrin, "and I guaranteed to take you to the shelter of an American warship."

"You have blundered slightly, haven't you?" asked Benedito, with a smile. "But do not worry about my fears. See, I defy the Rovistas!"

Saying which Don José took off his felt hat, waving it wildly at the oncoming Vengaran warship.

"Stop that," ordered Dave sternly, laying a hand on Benedito's arm. "Man, there may be a chance for us to slip away in the dark, but if you keep on waving like that you may but sign your own death warrant!"

"Let it be, then," hissed the rebel chieftain, giving another wild flourish with his hat before Dave snatched away that article.

"Look there!" quavered Dan Dalzell. "The 'Zapata' is changing her course to pursue us, and there goes a bow gun as a signal for us to lie to!"

The two young American naval officers watched the cruiser in fascination.

CHAPTER XXII

DARRIN OFFERS THE GRIM CHOICE

"WHAT are the orders?" gasped Dan. "Do we obey that signal and lie to?"

"We do not," Dave Darrin shot back. "We shall make every effort to escape."

Then he added, with a smile:

"This boat of ours represents, for the time being, the American Navy, and we do not lie to for any craft that floats, save a superior vessel of our own Navy."

"That's the spirit!" laughed Don José easily. "Escape by all means."

"My compliments to you, Don José Benedito," Dave cried, in admiration. "You permitted us to take you prisoner, but you are no coward. With all the chances now in favor of your capture and speedy execution, you are the coolest of the three of us."

"One may die but once," replied Don José, then bent his head below the thwarts that he might light a cigar.

Dave regarded his captive gravely. Was the rebel chieftain going out of his mind, that he

took the present position so merrily? It did not seem natural for one to jest so readily over his approaching fate.

"This Vengaran rebel is as cool as a cucumber," murmured Danny Grin under his breath.

Darkness was now rapidly coming on. In the light breeze the little sailboat was not logging more than six knots an hour, while the pursuing cruiser was making easily twelve.

"It will be dark in five minutes," Dave called to his chum. "By changing our course we may get away from the 'Zapata.' Don José, do you know if the cruiser carries searchlights?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Benedito.

Dave, scanning sky and sea, at last called out:

"Now we'll try it, Danny. Throw her over four points to port, and we'll see whether the 'Zapata' discovers our trick."

For now it was quite dark, and the running lights of the Vengaran cruiser could be made out distinctly.

Promptly Danny Grin ported his helm, bringing the little sloop around with a swirl.

"The 'Zapata' is keeping on her course," reported Dave, joyously. "Oh, if she may only fail to discover *our* course!"

Hardly had the words left his mouth when a broad beam of light ascended skyward, next fell to the waters and moved about.

"The cruiser carries a searchlight, and the game's up," Dave announced mournfully. Just then the sailboat stood out distinctly under the "Zapata's" roving beam. The light passed by, then came back, and was held steadily on the little quarry.

"It's but the work of minutes," Darrin groaned. "Don José, I feel that we must apologize to you for this tragic outcome of our enterprise."

"I am not complaining," replied Benedito, puffing slowly at his cigar, and without shifting his position from which he could watch the approach of the "Zapata."

For a few moments Dave remained lost in thought. Then, slowly, he drew out his automatic revolver. Shuddering slightly, Ensign Darrin slowly passed the weapon, butt-first, toward his prisoner.

"Don José," went on the young naval officer, hesitatingly, "I am no believer in suicide, and I do not counsel it in this case. Yet I am mindful of the fact that, if taken, you may be tormented to death by your enemies. In olden times it was a common thing for a defeated leader to fall upon his own sword and end his life, and I have read that our own American officers, when about to fall into the hands of Indians, have shot themselves sooner than endure the tortures they knew the redskins would inflict upon them. So, sir,

if you — if you — wish to seek that way out of your troubles, you may do so. I do not counsel it, but I cannot forget that it was I who was responsible for the plan to capture you and to bring you through to the coast."

"You are courteous to the last, Ensign Darrin, and as considerate as any one could ask you to be," replied Don José, as he reached out and took the automatic revolver.

Dave turned away his face, unable to watch the act that might come at any moment. Dan could not look away, for he needs must keep his glance on the boat's course.

Boom! sounded across the water. The 'Zapata,' now within half a mile, fired another signal to lie to, but Dan held on his course.

Boom! Another solid shot struck the water, only a few yards away.

"That commander means business," murmured Dan.

A third report. This time it was a shell and came close enough to show that the 'Zapata's' commanding officer was determined to bring the little boat to or else sink it.

"It will be better to be sunk than to fail in our intention to save you from the Rovistas, sir," remarked Ensign Darrin, venturing to glance again at the rebel chieftain.

"Not so," replied Don José calmly, "and while

I thank you for the loan of your pistol, I now beg permission to return it to you. I am not going to kill myself."

"Thank you, Don José," uttered Dave Darrin, heaving a sigh of intense relief. "And allow me to assure you, sir, that I most highly admire the courage that actuates your conduct."

"Will you be so kind as to do me one very great favor, now?" begged the former dictator of Vengara.

"If it be one that I may properly grant," Dave assured him.

"Then be good enough to lie to and let the cruiser overhaul us. If you do not —"

Boom! This time a shell shrieked by within a foot of the masthead.

"That commander will sink you if you do not obey," Don José continued.

"But we feel that our lives are very fairly forfeit if we do not carry out our promise to take you to an American warship," Dave replied. "Let the Vengaran sink us if he will."

"I put the request as a favor to myself," replied Don José, rather stiffly.

"*You* prefer surrender to being sunk?" gasped Ensign Dave Darrin.

"Decidedly," affirmed Benedito.

For one instant Dave Darrin gazed fixedly at the rebel leader. Then he called tersely:

"Let your sheet out, Dan, and lie to awaiting further orders from the cruiser."

So much astonished that he acted rather against his will, Danny Grin eased off the sheet. After losing headway the sloop lay tossing idly on the waters.

"It isn't too late to take the sinking finish, if you prefer, Don José," Dave hinted.

"I don't," snapped Benedito, so sharply as to make his remark almost a direct affront.

"Naturally the poor fellow's nerves are worked up to a high pitch," thought Ensign Darrin pityingly. "I must be patient with him to the last. Indeed, I wonder that he can treat us with even any semblance of patience."

Now, all in a moment, the "Zapata" seemed to lose headway. As a matter of fact her engines had stopped, and soon the cruiser lay in the trough of the light sea that was running.

Next a boat was lowered over the side. A dozen seamen and an officer could soon be made out in a small boat as it passed through the beam of the searchlight. The boat finally ranged up alongside the sloop, and boathooks were thrown out fore and aft to effect a grapple.

"You act suspiciously, gentlemen," exclaimed the Vengaran naval officer in the stern of the boat, "when you refuse to answer our signals to lie to."

"But do you observe, sir," Dave inquired coldly, speaking also in Spanish, "that two of us are in the uniform of the United States Navy? In effect, your craft has fired upon a United States war vessel."

"You may think that, if you wish," laughed the Vengaran officer, shortly, "but two uniforms do not determine a craft as a war vessel. I am under orders to take you into this boat and to convey you to the 'Zapata.' I am to use whatever force may be necessary. Will you submit peacefully?"

"It is for you to say," whispered Ensign Darrin in Benedito's ear.

"I am for surrender," replied the former dictator in a low tone.

"We submit, sir," replied Dave, to the Vengaran naval officer, "but we do so only under most emphatic protest. You and your commanding officer, sir, must hold yourselves ready to answer to the severest inquiries from the United States Government."

"Let it be so," replied the Vengaran, shrugging his shoulders. "Be good enough to come into this boat without delay."

Dave, Dan and their captive were transferred to the small boat, leaving the sloop adrift. Return was made to the "Zapata," over whose port side forward a gangway had been lowered.

In a few minutes the trio from the sloop had gone up over the side, and there stood confronting the captain of the "Zapata," flanked by more than a dozen of his officers, and with a background of sailors of the Vengaran Navy.

"Welcome on board, Don José Benedito, Señor el Presidente de Vengara!" cried the captain joyfully, as he reached out to grasp Benedito's hand.

"What!" demanded Ensign Dave Darrin, thunderstruck. "Captain, do you greet this man as President of Vengara? Is this, then, a rebel warship?"

"It is," laughed Captain Pota, "and we of the 'Zapata' hail Don José as rightful president of the republic."

"And you, young gentlemen, are now *my* prisoners," laughed Benedito, softly. "Nor will you find me alarmed over any threats you may make in the name of your Government!"

CHAPTER XXIII

DANNY GRIN'S THIRD DEGREE STUNT

"WE ought to make a grand pair of ship's mascots," grunted Danny Grin, "for we're surely a pair of goats this time, Dave!"

"So this, my meddlesome young Americans," laughed Don José, "is the great finish of your daring enterprise. Now, do you understand why I waved defiance with my hat? It was a signal that I waved, and one which Captain Pota knew would be waved only by myself or by a most trusted messenger of mine."

"But the 'Zapata' has been reckoned as a loyal ship, along with all the others of the Vengaran Navy," protested Darrin, to whom the present situation seemed like a dream from which he must soon awake.

"We were loyal until Don José needed us," laughed Captain Pota. From now on we shall be loyal only to Don José, who, within a few days, must be President of Vengara."

"It was this ship," smiled Benedito, showing his teeth, "that picked me up from a small schooner that bore me from Colon. It was this

ship which, under cover of the darkness, the night before you two saw me near La Choya, put me ashore without trouble, and without suspicion on the part of either Rovistas or American sailors. And it was you young meddlers who nearly overthrew my revolution. But now I shall deal with you in a way that shall never reach American ears, for you shall not live to bear witness against me!"

Saluting with every sign of deepest respect, Captain Pota here added:

"Señor Presidente, we are ready to punish these enemies in whatever way you command. And the bodies, weighted, can then be dropped overboard. They will sink to the bottom of the ocean."

"Let us not be in too much of a hurry, my good Captain," begged the rebel chieftain. "In fact, I have not, up to this moment, decided just what I wish to do with these young meddlers from the Land of the Eagle. The punishment, whatever it is to be, shall be something humorous and fitting, and it shall come as soon as I have had time to smoke another cigar and reflect. In the meantime, you may as well get out the weights for sinking two bodies, and —"

He paused, turning to regard Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell with a look of smiling, fiendish cruelty.

The "Zapata" was once more under way, standing out to sea. Darrin, turning on his heel, stepped out of range of Don José's disconcerting gaze. Danny Grin kept at his chum's side. Though many threatening glances followed the trapped young Americans, none offered to bar their way.

Blowing out a great cloud of smoke, Don José watched the young American officers in all too plain delight, as they boldly strolled away from their tormentors.

Not an atom of pity entered his soul even when recalling Dave's consideration for him at the time when it looked as if he must be doomed to fall into the power of the Rovistas. The rebel leader could remember only that they had made him a prisoner, and had borne him away from the very midst of his own army in the field.

All the worst characteristics of his race, and none of its virtues, entered into the make-up of this former dictator and present aspirant for the presidency of Vengara.

"Let the Americans be followed at a little distance," Don José murmured indolently to Captain Pota. "Let them roam the ship for a while, but I do not wish them to have an opportunity to leap overboard. They suspect that I shall not prove forgiving, and they may be tempted to

commit suicide rather than to face what they imagine is in store for them."

Though designed as a small cruiser, the "Zapata" carried a wheelhouse at the forward end of the hurricane deck. Over the wheel-house was the bridge on which the watch officer paced.

Since none attempted to hinder, Dave Darrin ascended the steps leading to the upper deck. Side by side he and Dan passed the open door of the wheelhouse. Strolling forward came an officer of the cruiser who appeared to be off duty, for the glowing end of a cigar between his lips proclaimed that he was smoking.

With an air of indolence Dave halted, Dalzell doing the same.

"Get that chap's cigar," whispered Dave. "Don't miss it. Then throw him down the companionway to the deck below. Do it like lightning and don't fumble."

Glancing the other way the young ensigns waited until the smoking officer was close at hand. Then —

Snatch! Grip! Biff! Dan Dalzell had that cigar, and he also had a good hold of the smoker. In a flash, that astounded individual went plunging down the companionway stairs to the deck below.

At the first sound of the scrimmage Dave Darrin sprang into the wheelhouse. Before either

of the two startled men there could interfere Ensign Darrin grabbed an armful of signal rockets, resting in a rack, and reappeared on deck.

"Be quick here, Danny boy!" panted Dave eagerly, and in a low voice, while angry roars came up from the deck below. "Signal for 'immediate assistance' and be sure to get the signal off before I go down under the rush!"

Like lightning Danny Grin received the armful of rockets. He dropped two or three of them, but it did not matter. With the rest he rushed to the nearest foot rail. Bracing his rockets there, after a hasty selection, he sent three of them hissing rapidly aloft.

Nor was there time to spare, for now Dave Darrin was the live center of a mad rush of officers and men who had dashed up from the deck below.

Biff! smash! Down, and up again! Whack! bang! How Darrin's fists flew! He still had his revolver, but he had no thought of using it. No pistol could save his life if these men wanted to take it, and he had no relish for killing brown-skinned sailormen who only obeyed orders given by their officiers.

Bump! Thump! For fully a minute Dave Darrin gave a magnificent exposition of the best there is in American boxing. Then he was borne

down by the sheer weight of numbers, as he knew he must be in time.

That fracas had given Dalzell time to touch the glowing cigar end to the fuses of three rockets, and then to three more, thus sending the signal twice out into the blackness of the night.

If the "Panama" were anywhere within a good many miles of the "Zapata's" present position, these signals should be seen and reported.

Dave, once down, was subjected to a rain of brutal blows and kicks. Dan Dalzell wheeled, saw, and his blood boiled. Bellowing like an angry bull, he lowered his head and hurled himself into that crowd.

It was another thirty seconds before Dan Dalzell went to the deck, and though he was now savagely treated, he had given several of the brown foemen several kinds of headaches.

"Don't kill the Americans!" ordered Captain Pota, rushing to the scene. "They are to be reserved for punishment more clever than you know how to inflict, my good men."

Ship's irons were brought out, and both the young American naval officers were manacled. Thus, helpless, they were conducted to the deck below, where Don José eyed them gloatingly.

"Go below, my young meddlers," said the dictator. "In a little while you shall see what pleasures I am able to provide for such friends

as you. Do not worry. I promise you that you shall not find this night dull!"

Handled by more than half a dozen Vengaran sailors, and conducted by an officer, Darrin and Dalzell were forced to a still lower deck. Into a cell-like room they were driven, and an iron-barred door was slammed shut. Beyond, a wooden door was closed and locked, and now the two American ensigns found themselves in utter darkness.

"All we can do," muttered Danny Grin, between his teeth, "is to pray that the 'Panama' was near enough, and that the rockets were seen from her bridge."

"If the 'Panama' was near enough," Dave replied, in a whisper, "you may be sure that the rockets were seen. You know how efficient the bridge watch is on that glorious fighting craft."

* * * * * * * * * *

As it chanced, at the time, the "Panama," cruising slowly not far from the port of La Choya, was within fifteen miles of the "Zapata."

"Sir, rockets going up three points off the starboard bow," reported a keen-eyed young sailor to the officer of the deck.

Lieutenant Commander Whelan turned around sharply.

"The signal for 'immediate help,' sir," continued the young sailor, as Whelan and Lieu-

tenant Somers wheeled and stood watching the flight of rockets.

"Yes; there goes the signal, repeated," commented Lieutenant Commander Whelan.

"I wonder what it can mean?" murmured Somers. "The night is too still for a marine disaster."

"The sea is never too still for a collision," rejoined Whelan. "Say, Somers, do you note that the rockets' average flight was at an angle of only about thirty degrees above the horizon? One would think Dalzell were there, for I was his instructor in signaling at Annapolis, and that lad never seemed to be able to get his rockets to go more than thirty degrees above the horizon. His classmates used to guy him about it."

"It couldn't be Dalzell in this case, could it?" suggested Lieutenant Somers wonderingly. "Ensign Dalzell is with Ensign Darrin on some secret mission, you know."

"By jove, it couldn't be Dalzell, could it?" cried Lieutenant Commander Whelan. "I've got to report this to the executive officer, anyway, and I may as well tell him what you've guessed."

Whereupon Whelan rushed to the bridge telephone and called up the executive officer, reporting the signals and the seemingly absurd conjecture about the identity of the sender.

"Go full speed straight toward the rockets,

and use the searchlight as soon as you deem necessary," ordered the executive officer. "In the meantime I'll confer with the captain."

For which reason the battleship "Panama" turned at once in her course, and was soon forging ahead at a pace of twenty-one knots.

Fortunately, Whelan did not use the searchlight too early. When he did, the beams, on that quiet night, picked up the "Zapata," now less than five miles away.

By this time the executive officer, primed with orders from the captain, stood on the bridge with his subordinates.

"Mr. Whelan, use the searchlight to signal to the 'Zapata' to stop and lie to," came the sharp order.

Though the "Panama" signaled twice, no attention was paid by the rebel cruiser. The distance was now about four miles.

"Use a bow gun and put a shell across that rascal's course," ordered the executive officer.

Keen, now, for the chase, Whelan obeyed on the jump. A big gun sent its bark over the water, a small geyser spurting up where a shell struck the sea near the rebel cruiser. After the second summons in that tone the "Zapata" lay to.

Now the battleship steamed rapidly up, halted some eight hundred yards away, and put over the side a launch that sped away with twenty

sailors, a dozen marines, Ensigns Galloway and Huber, all under command of Lieutenant Somers.

All but enough men to handle the launch went up over the side of the "Zapata" and stood confronting Captain Pota.

"Captain Potter's compliments, sir," said Somers, rather sternly, "and he desires to know why you did not lay to as soon as he flashed the signal to you."

Somers, wisely, had spoken in his best Annapolis Spanish. Pota, who at another time might have prided himself on the fact that his name so closely resembled that of Captain Potter, the commander of the great American battleship, replied stiffly:

"I command a ship of the Vengaran Navy, sir, and I do not need to lay to at the summons of any navy commander on earth, unless it be an admiral of our own navy."

"Courtesy should have prompted you to do it," replied Lieutenant Somers.

"Courtesy is not compulsory," retorted Captain Pota.

"Sometimes it is," replied Somers. "And this is one of those times. Sir, I am obliged to inform you that we seek two young officers of our Navy, Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell, believed to be on board this craft."

"We have no Americans on board," promptly

lied Captain Pota, "except those of your own visiting party."

"You will not object to satisfying us of the truth of that statement?" pressed Mr. Somers.

"Lieutenant, if your commanding officer desires it, though we would deplore the humiliation, I shall permit you to search this vessel from one end to the other," replied Captain Pota, who must have had excellent reasons for being so willing to have a search made.

Lieutenant Somers glanced, half-questioningly, at the two brother officers who were with him.

Mr. Somers was in command of the American party. He did not need to seek their approval, but he did desire their opinions.

CHAPTER XXIV

CONCLUSION

"IT won't do any harm to search," murmured Ensign Galloway.

"We can hardly go back without having made a search," added Ensign Huber.

"If you will pass the order that we are not to be interfered with," proposed Lieutenant Somers, "I will head a party to go through the vessel."

"I will send guides with you," volunteered Captain Pota.

"Sir," returned Lieutenant Somers, "I would prefer to go without guides."

"As you will, of course," murmured the "Zapata's" commander. "Under any conditions permission to make such a search, in the face of my word, humiliates the Vengaran Navy."

Detailing twelve men, and inviting Mr. Galloway to go with him, Somers left Ensign Huber and the rest of the detachment on deck.

No sooner had Somers started below than Huber, a pocket flash lamp in his hand, stepped to the rail, signaling by flashes to the "Panama" the information obtained up to that moment.

Down below, in that brig-like cell, Dave and Dan now had company. Four Vengaran sailormen stood in the cell with them.

"Americans are searching the ship," announced one of the newcomers. "You will make no sound. If you do anything whatever to attract the attention of the visitors, we have orders to shoot you at once — in fact, our orders are to empty the magazines of our rifles into your worthless carcasses."

So Dave and Dan stood there, silent, lips grimly compressed, awaiting the turn of events while four swarthy-skinned men stood with rifles at "ready," prepared to do murder in the name of Vengaran civilization.

For twenty minutes Mr. Somers searched without avail. At last Dave's quick ear heard a voice, not far away, calling:

"Darrin! Dalzell! Do you hear me?"

"Answer and we kill!" hissed the sailor who had given the former orders.

"You poor, stupid fool!" uttered Dave scornfully. "Do you know that, if you kill us, you will be executed as pirates? Do you know *how* the United States Navy executes pirates? Do you want to know? I am going to answer that hail. Kill, if you dare!"

"Darrin! Dalzell! Can you hear me?" came the bellowed demand.

"Here! In here, Mr. Somers!" shouted Dave, at the top of his voice.

"Here we are!" Dan's voice took up the cry.

Three Vengaran rifles were instantly cocked.

"Our friends are coming. Kill, if you dare!" mocked Ensign Dave Darrin, wheeling upon his armed jailers.

He and Dan might have attacked these armed guards, and might even have wrenched away a rifle apiece. But a struggle did not now seem worth while, for the rattle and bang of husky American shoulders assailing the wooden door beyond now filled the air.

Down came the barrier with a crash.

"Right here, Mr. Somers," cheered Dave.

Two officers behind the bars, and two in front, exchanged hasty handclasps, after which Ensign Galloway was sent darting to the deck above to demand that the American ensigns be released at once. And Ensign Somers flashed the news to the commander of the "Panama."

Captain Pota was forced to yield, and to turn over the key to the iron-barred door. Almost at once, too, three launches left the "Panama," coming alongside with a hundred and fifty American sailors and marines, all under command of Lieutenant Commander Boxton.

Dave and Dan, who were now on deck, had received congratulations, and had told their

story to many listeners. Mr. Boxton promptly flashed the news to the "Panama."

Back came the message:

"Captain Potter directs that you retain as prize crew, under your command, all except enough men to man one launch, and that you search until Benedito is found. Then send him over to this ship in irons. Inform Captain Pota that on testimony of Ensigns Darrin and Dalzell, the 'Zapata' cannot be regarded as a Vengaran war vessel, but must be classed as a pirate."

Nor was there, when this message was delivered, any lack of howling protest. But Pota, his officers and crew were compelled to submit. Pota's men were driven below, his officers were sent over the side to the launches, and Lieutenant Commander Boxton took full command of the "Zapata."

Not until half an hour later was José Benedito found, cowering under a stoker's berth on one of the lowermost decks. A revolver was snatched from the hands of the ex-dictator just in time to prevent that scoundrel from taking his own life.

Dave and Dan returned to the "Panama" in the same launch that took the ex-dictator.

"You appear to triumph!" sneered the former dictator, hoarse with rage.

"Those who serve truth and right usually do triumph," Dave answered, calmly.

Long before daylight the "Panama" and "Zapata" dropped anchor in the roadstead at La Choya.

With the authenticated news that Benedito had been captured and was on board an American man-of-war, and his absence from his own army assured, the revolution, which had seemed destined to win, now collapsed. Its subordinate leaders were glad to make such peace with President Rova as they could.

To be sure, President Rova made a polite demand that Benedito and the officers of the "Zapata" be turned over to his government. This request was as politely refused by the United States.

Captain Pota and his officers were sent to Colon on another vessel of the American Navy, and were turned loose to take care of their own destinies.

Don José Benedito was also taken to Colon, whence he was sent, under guard, to New York. The immigration authorities there refused to permit him to land, and he soon took passage to France, where, if he wishes to fight, he may find abundant opportunities. Señorita Benedito joined her husband, and sometimes at the theatre or at a ball she wears the resplendent jeweled cross.

At the request of Captain Potter, of the "Panama," President Rova readily undertook to find the owner of the borrowed sloop and to

compensate him handsomely for its loss. The three abandoned horses were found, and seized by the Vengaran Army.

Peace once more reigns supreme in Vengara, for certainly President Rova appears to be an enlightened and generous ruler.

Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell, on their return to the United States, were summoned before the Secretary of the Navy, who commended them most warmly for their splendid service, which had doubtless saved thousands of Vengaran lives, and had as certainly prevented a money panic that would have followed Benedito's return to office and his repudiation of Vengara's large public debt, together with his cancellation of the highly valuable concessions in that republic to foreign syndicates.

"And I will add, further," said the Secretary of the Navy, "that, though the newspapers do not appear to have got hold of this bit of international gossip, a resolution was hurriedly passed by Congress authorizing each of you young officers to accept this remembrance from the government of Vengara."

Into the hands of each the Secretary pressed a wallet filled with yellow-backed notes.

"You will each find there five thousand dollars," went on the Secretary. "President Rova would gladly have rewarded you several times as

handsomely, but the President and I knew that there would be difficulty in getting Congress to agree to allow you to accept any greater reward."

Being on leave, Ensign Dave hastened away to Gridley to meet Mrs. Darrin, at one time Miss Belle Meade.

Danny Grin, having no wife to meet, went to Gridley, anyway, where he was always sure of an enthusiastic greeting.

When next we meet Dave Darrin and Danny Grin it will be in a far-away quarter of the world, but under the liveliest circumstances imaginable. We shall see them at Manila, and again in China. Their new and amazing doings will be found fully and vividly narrated in the next volume of this series, which will be published under the title, "Dave Darrin on the Asiatic Station; or, Winning Lieutenants' Commissions on the Admiral's Flagship."

THE END

ALTEMUS BOOKS

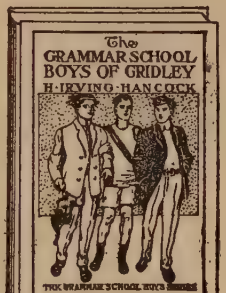
The Best and Least Expensive Books
for Twentieth Century Boys and Girls

BOOKS FOR BOYS

THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



Dick Prescott, Dan Dalzell, Tom Reade, and the other members of Dick & Co. are always found in the forefront of things—in scholarship, athletics, and in school-boy fun. Small wonder that this series has made such a hit with the boys of America.

1. THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS OF GRIDLEY; or, Dick and Co. Start Things Moving.
2. THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS SNOWBOUND; or, Dick and Co. at Winter Sports.
3. THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS IN THE WOODS; or, Dick and Co. Trail Fun and Knowledge.
4. THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS IN SUMMER ATHLETICS; or, Dick and Co. Make Their Fame Secure.

THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH

This series of stories, based on the actual doings of High School boys, teems with incidents in athletics and school-boy fun. The real Americanism of Dick Prescott and his chums will excite the admiration of every reader.

1. THE HIGH SCHOOL FRESHMEN; or, Dick and Co.'s First Year Pranks and Sports.
2. THE HIGH SCHOOL PITCHER; or, Dick and Co. on the Gridley Diamond.
3. THE HIGH SCHOOL LEFT END; or, Dick and Co. Grilling on the Football Gridiron.
4. THE HIGH SCHOOL CAPTAIN OF THE TEAM; or, Dick and Co. Leading the Athletic Vanguard.

Sold by all Booksellers or Sent Postpaid on Receipt of Price.

HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

1326-1336 Vine Street, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS VACATION SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH

Outdoor sports are the keynote of these volumes. Boys will alternately thrill and chuckle over these splendid narratives of the further adventures of Dick Prescott and his chums.

1. THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' CANOE CLUB; or, Dick and Co.'s Rivals on Lake Pleasant.
2. THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS IN SUMMER CAMP; or, The Dick Prescott Six Training for the Gridley Eleven.
3. THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' FISHING TRIP; or, Dick and Co. in the Wilderness.
4. THE HIGH SCHOOL BOYS' TRAINING HIKE; or, Dick and Co. Making Themselves "Hard as Nails."

THE YOUNG ENGINEERS SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH

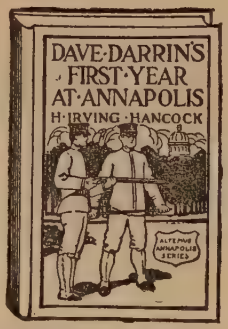
Tom Reade and Harry Hazelton meet every requirement as young civil engineers with pick, shovel, and pluck, and with resourcefulness and determination overcome all obstacles.

1. THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN COLORADO; or, At Railroad Building in Earnest.
2. THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN ARIZONA; or, Laying Tracks on the "Man-Killer" Quicksand.
3. THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN NEVADA; or, Seeking Fortune on the Turn of a Pick.
4. THE YOUNG ENGINEERS IN MEXICO; or, Fighting the Mine Swindlers.
5. THE YOUNG ENGINEERS ON THE GULF; or, The Dread Mystery of the Million-Dollar Breakwater.

THE ANNAPOLIS SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell proved their mettle at the U. S. Naval Academy and gave promise of what might be expected of them in the great war that was even at that moment hovering over the world.

1. DAVE DARRIN'S FIRST YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS; or, Two Plebe Midshipmen at the U. S. Naval Academy.
2. DAVE DARRIN'S SECOND YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS; or, Two Midshipmen as Naval Academy "Youngsters."
3. DAVE DARRIN'S THIRD YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS; or, Leaders of the Second Class Midshipmen.
4. DAVE DARRIN'S FOURTH YEAR AT ANNAPOLIS; or, Headed for Graduation and the Big Cruise.

THE WEST POINT SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH

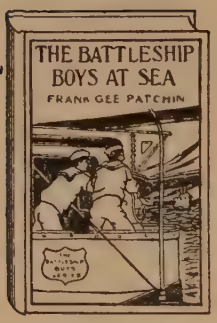
Dick Prescott and Greg Holmes are not human wonders, but a pair of average bright American boys who had a hard enough time working their way through West Point. Their experiences will inspire all other American boys.

1. DICK PRESCOTT'S FIRST YEAR AT WEST POINT; or, Two Chums in the Cadet Gray.
2. DICK PRESCOTT'S SECOND YEAR AT WEST POINT; or, Finding the Glory of the Soldier's Life.
3. DICK PRESCOTT'S THIRD YEAR AT WEST POINT; or, Standing Firm for Flag and Honor.
4. DICK PRESCOTT'S FOURTH YEAR AT WEST POINT; or, Ready to Drop the Gray for Shoulder Straps.

THE BATTLESHIP BOYS SERIES

By FRANK GEE PATCHIN

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



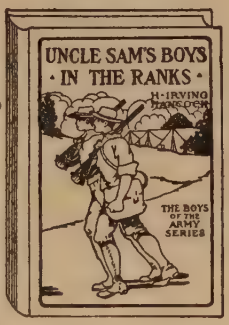
Inspiring adventure, moving incidents over the seven seas, and in the air above them; fighting the Huns from the decks of sinking ships, and coming to grief above the clouds; strange peoples and still stranger experiences, are some of the things that the readers of this series will live when they cruise with Dan Davis and Sam Hickey. Mr. Patchin has lived every phase of the life he writes about, and his stories truly depict life in the various branches of the navy—stories that glow with the spirit of patriotism that has made the American navy what it proved itself to be in the world war.

1. THE BATTLESHIP BOYS AT SEA; or, Two Apprentices in Uncle Sam's Navy.
2. THE BATTLESHIP BOYS' FIRST STEP UPWARD; or, Winning Their Grades as Petty Officers.
3. THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN FOREIGN SERVICE; or, Earning New Ratings in European Seas.
4. THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN THE TROPICS; or, Upholding the American Flag in a Honduras Revolution.
5. THE BATTLESHIP BOYS UNDER FIRE; or, The Dash for the Besieged Kam Shau Mission.
6. THE BATTLESHIP BOYS IN THE WARDROOM; or, Winning Their Commissions as Line Officers.
7. THE BATTLESHIP BOYS WITH THE ADRIATIC CHASERS; or, Blocking the Path of the Undersea Raiders.
8. THE BATTLESHIP BOYS ON SKY PATROL; or, Fighting the Hun from Above the Clouds.

THE BOYS OF THE ARMY SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



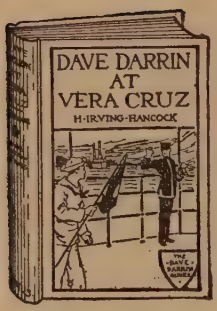
These stimulating stories are among the best of their class that have ever been written. They breathe the life and spirit of our army of today, and in which Uncle Sam's Boys fought with a courage and devotion excelled by none in the world war. There is no better way to instil patriotism in the coming generation than by placing in the hands of juvenile readers books in which a romantic atmosphere is thrown around the boys of the army with thrilling plots that boys love. The books of this series tell in story form the life of a soldier from the rookie stage until he has qualified for an officer's commission, and, among other things, present a true picture of the desperate days in fighting the Huns.

1. **UNCLE SAM'S BOYS IN THE RANKS; or, Two Recruits in the United States Army.**
2. **UNCLE SAM'S BOYS ON FIELD DUTY; or, Winning Corporals' Chevrons.**
3. **UNCLE SAM'S BOYS AS SERGEANTS; or, Handling Their First Real Commands.**
4. **UNCLE SAM'S BOYS IN THE PHILIPPINES; or, Following the Flag Against the Moros.**
5. **UNCLE SAM'S BOYS ON THEIR METTLE; or, A Chance to Win Officers' Commissions.**
6. **UNCLE SAM'S BOYS AS LIEUTENANTS; or, Serving Old Glory as Line Officers.**
7. **UNCLE SAM'S BOYS WITH PERSHING; or, Dick Prescott at Grips with the Boche.**
8. **UNCLE SAM'S BOYS SMASH THE GERMANS; or, Helping the Allies Wind Up the Great World War.**

DAVE DARRIN SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



No more efficient officers ever paced the deck of a man-o'-war than Dave Darrin and Dan Dalzell. The last two volumes chronicle the experiences of Dave and Dan in the great war.

1. DAVE DARRIN AT VERA CRUZ; or, Fighting With the U. S. Navy in Mexico.
2. DAVE DARRIN ON MEDITERRANEAN SERVICE; or, With Dan Dalzell on European Duty.
3. DAVE DARRIN'S SOUTH AMERICAN CRUISE; or, Two Innocent Young Naval Tools of an Infamous Conspiracy.
4. DAVE DARRIN ON THE ASIATIC STATION; or, Winning Lieutenants' Commissions on the Admiral's Flagship.
5. DAVE DARRIN AND THE GERMAN SUBMARINES; or, Making a Clean-up of the Hun Sea Monsters.
6. DAVE DARRIN AFTER THE MINE LAYERS; or, Hitting the Enemy a Hard Naval Blow.

THE CONQUEST OF THE UNITED STATES SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH

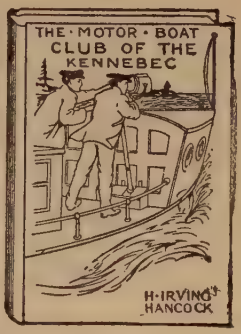
If the United States had not entered the war many things might have happened to America. No liberty-loving American boy can afford to miss reading these books.

1. THE INVASION OF THE UNITED STATES; or, Uncle Sam's Boys at the Capture of Boston.
2. IN THE BATTLE FOR NEW YORK; or, Uncle Sam's Boys in the Desperate Struggle for the Metropolis.
3. AT THE DEFENSE OF PITTSBURGH; or, The Struggle to Save America's "Fighting Steel" Supply.
4. MAKING THE LAST STAND FOR OLD GLORY; or, Uncle Sam's Boys in the Last Frantic Drive.

THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB SERIES

By H. IRVING HANCOCK

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



Bright and sparkling as the waters over which the Motor Boat Boys sail. Once cast off for a cruise with these hardy young fresh-water navigators the reader will not ask to be "put ashore" until the home port has finally been made. Manliness and pluck are reflected on every page; the plots are ingenious, the action swift, and the interest always tense. There is neither a yawn in a paragraph nor a dull moment in a chapter in this stirring series. No boy or girl will willingly lay down a volume of it until "the end." The stories also embody much useful information about the operation and handling of small power boats.

1. **THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB OF THE KENNEBEC; or, The Secret of Smugglers' Island.**

2. **THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AT NANTUCKET; or, The Mystery of the Dunstan Heir.**

3. **THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB OFF LONG ISLAND; or, A Daring Marine Game at Racing Speed.**

4. **THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AND THE WIRELESS; or, The Dot, Dash and Dare Cruise.**

5. **THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB IN FLORIDA; or, Laying the Ghost of Alligator Swamp.**

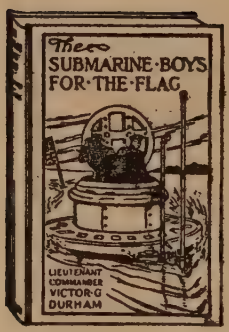
6. **THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB AT THE GOLDEN GATE; or, A Thrilling Capture in the Great Fog.**

7. **THE MOTOR BOAT CLUB ON THE GREAT LAKES; or, The Flying Dutchman of the Big Fresh Water.**

THE SUBMARINE BOYS SERIES

By VICTOR G. DURHAM

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



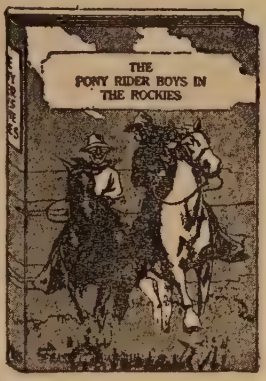
A voyage in an undersea boat! What boy has not done so time and again in his youthful dreams? The Submarine Boys did it in reality, diving into the dark depths of the sea, then, like Father Neptune, rising dripping from the deep to sunlight and safety. Yet it was not all easy sailing for the Submarine Boys, for these hardy young "undersea pirates" experienced a full measure of excitement and had their share of thrills, as all who sail under the surface of the seas are certain to do. The author knows undersea boats, and the reader who voyages with him may look forward to an instructive as well as lively cruise.

1. **THE SUBMARINE BOYS ON DUTY**; or, Life on a Diving Torpedo Boat.
2. **THE SUBMARINE BOYS' TRIAL TRIP**; or, "Making Good" as Young Experts.
3. **THE SUBMARINE BOYS AND THE MIDDIES**; or, The Prize Detail at Annapolis.
4. **THE SUBMARINE BOYS AND THE SPIES**; or, Dodging the Sharks of the Deep.
5. **THE SUBMARINE BOYS' LIGHTNING CRUISE**; or, The Young Kings of the Deep.
6. **THE SUBMARINE BOYS FOR THE FLAG**; or, Deeding Their Lives to Uncle Sam.
7. **THE SUBMARINE BOYS AND THE SMUGGLERS**; or, Breaking Up the New Jersey Customs Frauds.
8. **THE SUBMARINE BOYS' SECRET MISSION**; or, Beating an Ambassador's Game.

THE PONY RIDER BOYS SERIES

By FRANK GEE PATCHIN

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



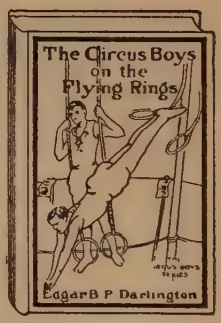
This unusual and popular series tells vividly the story of four adventure-loving lads, who, with their guardian, spent their summer vacations in the saddle in search of recreation and healthful adventure. Long journeys over mountain, through the fastness of primitive forest and across burning desert, lead them into the wild places of their native land as well as into many strange and exciting experiences. There is not a dull moment in the series.

1. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE ROCKIES; or, The Secret of the Lost Claim.
2. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN TEXAS; or, The Veiled Riddle of the Plains.
3. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN MONTANA; or, The Mystery of the Old Custer Trail.
4. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE OZARKS; or, The Secret of Ruby Mountain.
5. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE ALKALI; or, Finding a Key to the Desert Maze.
6. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN NEW MEXICO; or, The End of the Silver Trail.
7. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN THE GRAND CANYON; or, The Mystery of Bright Angel Gulch.
8. THE PONY RIDER BOYS WITH THE TEXAS RANGERS; or, On the Trail of the Border Bandits.
9. THE PONY RIDER BOYS ON THE BLUE RIDGE; or, A Lucky Find in the Carolina Mountains.
10. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN NEW ENGLAND; or, An Exciting Quest in the Maine Wilderness.
11. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN LOUISIANA; or, Following the Game Trails in the Canebrake.
12. THE PONY RIDER BOYS IN ALASKA; or, The Gold Diggers of Taku Pass.

THE CIRCUS BOYS SERIES

By EDGAR B. P. DARLINGTON

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



No call to the heart of the youth of America finds a readier response than the call of the billowing canvas, the big red wagons, the crash of the circus band and the trill of the ringmaster's whistle. It is a call that captures the imagination of old and young alike, and so do the books of this series capture and enthrall the reader, for they were written by one who, besides wielding a master pen, has followed the sawdust trail from coast to coast, who knows the circus people and the sturdy manliness of those who do and dare for the entertainment of millions of circus-goers when the grass is green. Mr. Darlington paints a true picture of the circus life.

1. THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE FLYING RINGS; or, Making the Start in the Sawdust Life.
2. THE CIRCUS BOYS ACROSS THE CONTINENT; or, Winning New Laurels on the Tanbark.
3. THE CIRCUS BOYS IN DIXIE LAND; or, Winning the Plaudits of the Sunny South.
4. THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE MISSISSIPPI; or, Afloat with the Big Show on the Big River.
5. THE CIRCUS BOYS ON THE PLAINS; or, The Young Advance Agents Ahead of the Show.

BOOKS FOR GIRLS

THE MADGE MORTON SERIES

By AMY D. V. CHALMERS

PRICE, $1.00 EACH

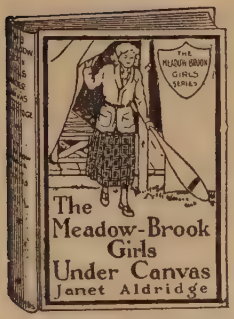
The heroines of these stories are four girls, who with enthusiasm for outdoor life, transformed a dilapidated canal boat into a pretty floating summer home. They christened the craft "The Merry Maid" and launched it on the shore of Chesapeake Bay. The stories are full of fun and adventure, with not a dull moment anywhere.

1. MADGE MORTON—CAPTAIN OF THE MERRY MAID.
2. MADGE MORTON'S SECRET.
3. MADGE MORTON'S TRUST.
4. MADGE MORTON'S VICTORY.

THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS SERIES

By JANET ALDRIDGE

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



Four clever girls go hiking around the country and meet with many thrilling and provoking adventures. These stories pulsate with the atmosphere of outdoor life.

1. THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS UNDER CANVAS; or, Fun and Frolic in the Summer Camp.
2. THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS ACROSS COUNTRY; or, The Young Pathfinders on a Summer Hike.
3. THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS AFLOAT; or, The Stormy Cruise of the Red Rover.
4. THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS IN THE HILLS; or, The Missing Pilot of the White Mountains.
5. THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS BY THE SEA; or, The Loss of the Lonesome Bar.
6. THE MEADOW-BROOK GIRLS ON THE TENNIS COURTS; or, Winning Out in the Big Tournament.

THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS SERIES

By LAURA DENT CRANE

PRICE, $1.00 EACH

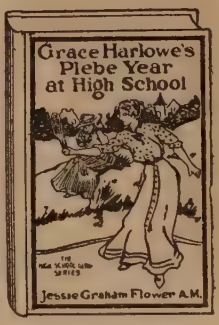
Girls as well as boys love wholesome adventure, a wealth of which is found in many forms and in many scenes in the volumes of this series.

1. THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS AT NEWPORT; or, Watching the Summer Parade.
2. THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS IN THE BERKSHIRES; or, The Ghost of Lost Man's Trail.
3. THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS ALONG THE HUDSON; or, Fighting Fire in Sleepy Hollow.
4. THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS AT CHICAGO; or, Winning Out Against Heavy Odds.
5. THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS AT PALM BEACH; or, Proving Their Mettle Under Southern Skies.
6. THE AUTOMOBILE GIRLS AT WASHINGTON; or, Checkmating the Plots of Foreign Spies.

THE HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS SERIES

By JESSIE GRAHAM FLOWER, A. M.

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



The scenes, episodes, and adventures through which Grace Harlowe and her intimate chums pass in the course of these stories are pictured with a vivacity that at once takes the young feminine captive.

1. GRACE HARLOWE'S PLEBE YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL; or, The Merry Doings of the Oakdale Freshmen Girls.
2. GRACE HARLOWE'S SOPHOMORE YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL; or, The Record of the Girl Chums in Work and Athletics.
3. GRACE HARLOWE'S JUNIOR YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL; or, Fast Friends in the Sororities.
4. GRACE HARLOWE'S SENIOR YEAR AT HIGH SCHOOL; or, The Parting of the Ways.

THE COLLEGE GIRLS SERIES

By JESSIE GRAHAM FLOWER, A. M.

PRICE, $1.00 EACH

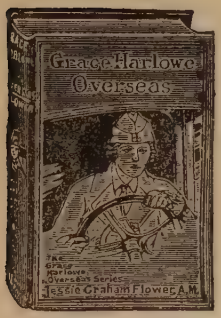
Every school and college girl will recognize that the account of Grace Harlowe's experiences at Overton College is true to life.

1. GRACE HARLOWE'S FIRST YEAR AT OVERTON COLLEGE.
2. GRACE HARLOWE'S SECOND YEAR AT OVERTON COLLEGE.
3. GRACE HARLOWE'S THIRD YEAR AT OVERTON COLLEGE.
4. GRACE HARLOWE'S FOURTH YEAR AT OVERTON COLLEGE.
5. GRACE HARLOWE'S RETURN TO OVERTON CAMPUS.
6. GRACE HARLOWE'S PROBLEM.
7. GRACE HARLOWE'S GOLDEN SUMMER.

THE GRACE HARLOWE OVERSEAS SERIES

By JESSIE GRAHAM FLOWER, A. M.

PRICE, $1.00 EACH



Grace Harlowe went with the Overton College Red Cross Unit to France, there to serve her country by aiding the American fighting forces.

1. GRACE HARLOWE OVERSEAS.
2. GRACE HARLOWE WITH THE RED CROSS IN FRANCE.
3. GRACE HARLOWE WITH THE MARINES AT CHATEAU THIERRY.
4. GRACE HARLOWE WITH THE U. S. TROOPS IN THE ARGONNE.
5. GRACE HARLOWE WITH THE YANKEE SHOCK BOYS AT ST. QUENTIN.
6. GRACE HARLOWE WITH THE AMERICAN ARMY ON THE RHINE.

THE GRACE HARLOWE OVERLAND RIDERS SERIES

By JESSIE GRAHAM FLOWER, A. M.

PRICE, $1.00 EACH

Grace Harlowe and her friends seek adventure on the mountain trails and in the wilder sections of their homeland, after their return from service in France.

1. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS ON THE OLD APACHE TRAIL.
2. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS ON THE GREAT AMERICAN DESERT.
3. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS AMONG THE KENTUCKY MOUNTAINEERS.
4. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS IN THE GREAT NORTH WOODS.
5. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS IN THE HIGH SIERRAS.
6. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS IN THE YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK.
7. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS IN THE BLACK HILLS.
8. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS AT CIRCLE O RANCH.
9. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS AMONG THE BORDER GUERRILLAS.
10. GRACE HARLOWE'S OVERLAND RIDERS ON THE LOST RIVER TRAIL.

ALTEMUS' NEW ILLUSTRATED YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIBRARY

A series of choice literature for children, selected from the best and most popular works. Printed on fine paper from large type, with numerous illustrations in color and black and white, by the most famous artists, making the most attractive series of juvenile classics before the public.

Fine English Cloth, Handsome New Original Designs
PRICE, 75 Cents Each

THE ADVENTURES OF ROBINSON CRUSOE. 70 illustrations.

ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND. 42 illustrations.

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS AND WHAT ALICE FOUND THERE. 50 illustrations.

BUNYAN'S PILGRIM'S PROGRESS. 46 illustrations.

A CHILD'S STORY OF THE BIBLE. 72 illustrations.

A CHILD'S LIFE OF CHRIST. 49 illustrations.

ÆSOP'S FABLES. 62 illustrations.

SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON. 50 illustrations.

THE MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY. By Edward Everett Hale. Illustrated.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS. 50 illustrations.

MOTHER GOOSE RHYMES, JINGLES, AND FAIRY TALES. 234 illustrations.

WOOD'S NATURAL HISTORY. 80 illustrations.

BLACK BEAUTY. By Anna Sewell. 50 illustrations.

ARABIAN NIGHTS' ENTERTAINMENTS. 130 illustrations.

WEE BOOKS FOR WEE FOLKS

For little hands to fondle and for mother to read aloud. Every ounce of them will give a ton of joy.

WEE BOOKS FOR WEE FOLKS SERIES

MOTHER GOOSE NURSERY TALES.
MOTHER GOOSE NURSERY RHYMES.
A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES. Robert Louis Stevenson.
THE FOOLISH FOX.
THREE LITTLE PIGS.
THE ROBBER KITTEN.
LITTLE BLACK SAMBO.
THE LITTLE SMALL RED HEN.
THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.
THE LITTLE WISE CHICKEN THAT KNEW IT ALL.
THE FOUR LITTLE PIGS THAT DIDN'T HAVE ANY MOTHER.
THE LITTLE PUPPY THAT WANTED TO KNOW TOO MUCH.
THE COCK, THE MOUSE AND THE LITTLE RED HEN.
GRUNTY GRUNTS AND SMILEY SMILE—INDOORS.
GRUNTY GRUNTS AND SMILEY SMILE—OUTDOORS.
I DON'T WANT TO WEAR COATS AND THINGS.
I DON'T WANT TO GO TO BED.
LITTLE SALLIE MANDY.
JIMMY SLIDERLEGS.
SLOVENLY BETSY.
LITTLE BLACK SAMBO AND THE BABY ELEPHANT.

WEE FOLKS BIBLE STORIES SERIES

WEE FOLKS STORIES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT. In Words of One Syllable.
WEE FOLKS STORIES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT. In Words of One Syllable.
WEE FOLKS LIFE OF CHRIST.
WEE FOLKS BIBLE A B C BOOK.
LITTLE PRAYERS FOR LITTLE LIPS.

THE WISH FAIRY SERIES

THE WISH FAIRY OF THE SUNSHINE AND SHADOW FOREST.
THE WISH FAIRY AND DEWY DEAR.

PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED IN COLORS. PRICE, 50c. EACH

WEE FOLKS PETER RABBIT SERIES

THE TALE OF PETER RABBIT.
HOW PETER RABBIT WENT TO SEA.
PETER RABBIT AT THE FARM.
PETER RABBIT'S CHRISTMAS.
PETER RABBIT'S EASTER.
WHEN PETER RABBIT WENT TO SCHOOL.
PETER RABBIT'S BIRTHDAY.
PETER RABBIT GOES A-VISITING.
PETER RABBIT AND JACK-THE-JUMPER.
PETER RABBIT AND THE LITTLE BOY.
PETER RABBIT AND LITTLE WHITE RABBIT.
PETER RABBIT AND THE OLD WITCH WOMAN.
PETER RABBIT AND THE BIG BROWN BEAR.
PETER RABBIT AND THE TINYBITS.
WHEN PETER RABBIT WENT A-FISHING.
PETER RABBIT AND THE TWO TERRIBLE FOXES.

WEE FOLKS CINDERELLA SERIES

THE WONDERFUL STORY OF CINDERELLA.
THE STORY OF LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD.
THE OLDTIME STORY OF THE THREE BEARS.
THE OLD, OLD STORY OF POOR COCK ROBIN.
CHICKEN LITTLE.
PUSS IN BOOTS.
THREE LITTLE KITTENS THAT LOST THEIR MITTENS.
JACK THE GIANT KILLER.
JACK AND THE BEAN-STALK.
TOM THUMB.

LITTLE BUNNIE BUNNIEKIN SERIES

LITTLE BUNNIE BUNNIEKIN.
LITTLE LAMBIE LAMBKIN.
LITTLE MOUSIE MOUSIEKIN.
LITTLE DEARIE DEER.
LITTLE SQUIRRELIE SQUIRRELIEKIN.
OLD RED REYNARD THE FOX.
HOOTIE TOOTS OF HOLLOW TREE.
FLAPSY FLOPPER OF THE FARM YARD.

PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED IN COLORS. PRICE, 50c. EACH